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See Page 568.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 513. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 29TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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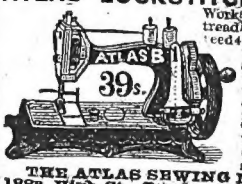

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SHORT STORIES

No. 513. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending Oct. 29, 1898.

THOSE WHO FOUGHT AT OMDURMAN.

No. 5.—Dervish Soldier.

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The Night of the Ball.

"We shall meet at the ball."

As Ethel Hetherington stood before the long pier glass in her bedroom, putting the finishing touches to an exquisite toilette, these words passed through and through her mind. Half-abstractedly she rearranged a dainty curl, a piece of soft lace and a ribbon, then stood away, drawn to her full height, and mechanically surveyed her own picture.

And clear grey eyes looked back into clear grey eyes and knew that the picture was beautiful.

But the vision had little enough hold on her, for another form rose up before the glass, and, as she slowly drew on her gloves, her thoughts were far away.

"We shall meet at the ball," he had said, and the remembrance of a certain subdued light in his eyes brought an answering light to her own and a faint flush to her cheeks.

The "Pale Proud Princess" they called her jestingly, and there were several in the brilliantly-lighted ballroom who wondered when they saw that faint flush. It took them back to an old time when she had been the radiant belle of each county ball, a laughing girl in her teens.

She had been statuesque so long now that they had almost forgotten. It was noticeable that while the men asked her far less beautiful sister for two and three dances, few ventured to ask her for more than one, and that

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they received with a more than usually deferential bow.

It seemed that they were all a little in awe of her. All except one, and when he approached her the flush deepened a little, and her whole face softened.

"I hope I am not too late; I have been detained," he said, in a deep, mellow voice.

She gave him her programme, and he wrote his name three times on it, the two last dances being near the end and following each other.

"May I?" he asked quietly, searching her face.

She murmured an assent and he moved away, but he did not ask anyone else to dance with him. Instead he took a seat beside an old lady, who was well known as a brilliant conversationalist, and remained there until his dance came.

There was something striking about this man, and many eyes glanced towards him again and again. Evidently he was a stranger, for those who appeared most at home in the room asked who he was.

Meanwhile the object of their curiosity sat very still, quietly surveying the whole company. He was not particularly handsome, but his face was clever and attractive; one recognised in it the face of a thinker and of a man of more than ordinary character. Masked cynicism was, perhaps, one of the most predominant traits, and a quiet, veiled scorn of much that he saw and much that he knew. Many times his keen eyes sought the form of Ethel Hetherington, but the closest observer could not have divined his thoughts towards her.

And Ethel danced on with a lighter heart and lighter step than was usual to her, knowing that her name was the only one on his card.

When the turn for their two came, he asked her if she would go out into the garden. She assented, for it was a beautiful June evening, and a young moon shed a soft, silvery light over the shrubs and trees that looked very inviting after the hot glare of the ball-room.

He fetched her a wrap, and then led her to a sheltered spot beside the lake, where they sat down with that absence of formality and general speech which betokens a quiet sense of understanding.

He sat half-turned to her so that he could see her face clearly. A deep interest was manifest in his own, and those who knew him well would have been surprised at it. For Lindsay Gibson was not an admirer of women; he knew their weaknesses too well and was too cynical to believe in them. A week ago he had been thrown rather curiously into Ethel Hetherington's society, and ever since he had been drawn back to it in a way that surprised even himself.

And Ethel watched for his coming back as she had not watched for anyone's return for years.

For some minutes they talked casually, and their conversation, typical of both, was of deep subjects far removed from the atmosphere of the ball-room.

"I am so fond of the night," she remarked presently, after a brief pause, "it is so grand and serene. It makes one ashamed of one's littleness and meanness. Life seems more real at night, and one forgets the farces."

"You have felt them?" he questioned.

"Often. There seems little enough that is real, but maybe the fault lies chiefly in ourselves."

"What does that little comprise, may I ask? I am afraid I cannot offer any examples myself."

"I have been sceptical a long time," she said, "but I believe in love and friendship."

"Do you?" and his lips curled significantly.

"I have a friend who is worth everything to me," she said quietly.

"I doubt it," he replied. "Don't think me rude, but I have always doubted if women were capable of real friendship towards each other."

She regarded him for a moment with a resentful air.

"What of men?" she asked.

"Men are better friends to each other than women. At the same time I am not a lover of my sex. We are all bad, everyone of us."

"You are somewhat sweeping."

"I have been round the world with my eyes open and all my senses on the alert, and I know."

"All the same one sees through the spectacles of one's own conclusions."

"Not solely. By gathering ideas as you go, you see through other people's spectacles as well."

"And have you been round the world and seen no love?" she asked with a touch of scorn.

"I have seen a great deal, but most of it was wasted."

"I don't understand."

"The son, whose mother breaks her heart for love of him, is usually the bad son. A strong man wastes his love on a frivolous, shallow woman, and a deep-hearted woman worships a selfish, egotistical man. I don't know how it is, but this has impressed me most."

"And whose fault is it?" she asked. Her face had grown white suddenly, and she was gripping the seat-rail hard.

"Not anyone's I suppose, only women are unreasonable and men are bad!"

"You are hard on my sex. If they are unreasonable they are also true."

"A few here and there, perhaps, and then, as often as not, they are unreasonable in being true."

She seemed stung, for her lips curled scornfully as she said:

"Women are not cowards. They will suffer for the sake of their principles and ideals, whereas a man will slip out the easiest way in preference."

"It is open to doubt as to which is the wisest."

She looked at him wonderingly, at a loss to know if he were serious or not.

He met her gaze unflinchingly.

"It is possible for an ideal to be wrong," he said quietly.

She looked away from him, and the whiteness grew on her face and the tightness about her lips. He was watching her closely, and a sudden thought seemed to come to him that moved him, and brought a keen, questioning look to his eyes.

For a few moments there was a tense silence, the very earth seemed waiting. Perhaps she knew that two of her children were about to stand face to face and soul to soul, with conventionality torn aside and truth uppermost. And maybe she felt Mrs. Grundy's shudder at the horrible spectacle of two people daring to be themselves.

"Ideals are very good," he said slowly at last, "but they are not often practical. When you are older you will understand what I mean."

"I do not think I shall know any better than I do now," she replied in a strained voice. "The truest measure of age is experience, and not years."

"If experience has left you your ideals you are indeed fortunate," he said bitterly.

"It would have left you yours had you been willing to pay the cost," was the slow reply.

He looked at her as if waiting for her to go on,

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and with the strained look growing in her eyes she added:

"I have."

Then it seemed to him, as he continued watching her, that a veil was lifted from her face, revealing something he had not expected—the look of a woman who sometime has played fearlessly with high stakes in the game of life and accepted the issue.

"You interest me deeply," he said, "but I feel I may not ask you to tell me more," yet his attitude expressed waiting expectancy.

"I don't know why I should mind telling you," she said, sitting up straight and looking before her without seeing anything. "It all happened long ago, and there is nothing to be ashamed of. You doubt love and friendship, but I believe in both because I have proved both; the one in a friend, the other in myself. Eight years ago I had a lover. I was very young and very earnest, and when I gave him my heart I gave him all I had. I was never half-hearted about anything in my love; I lived up to the highest ideal I could conceive. For many reasons we could not be openly engaged, but I was not afraid to wait; I felt time could make very little difference to a love like mine.

"But it wasn't easy, for there were many hard things to bear from my people, as well as the waiting and loneliness. But I hoped on undaunted, with absolute faith in my lover and the belief in a happiness in my future that would more than atone for every hour of pain."

Her face grew grey, and she bit her lips, while his, colourless as her own, changed strangely.

"I waited five years," she went on with forced calmness, "and then a newspaper told me he had married someone else."

A long pause followed, and widely different thoughts coursed through their minds. To her the conversation had been the reopening of an old wound that had cut too deep ever to heal entirely, and had not yet lost its power to pain. To him the revelation had come like a blow from an unseen hand, and shattered a beautiful new fabrication he had but just built, and in which she was the corner-stone, leaving him with the ruins all about him.

For Lindsay Gibson was a man of strong opinions, and what he had just heard struck dead across the face of one of them.

At last he spoke.

"Supposing you met that man again," he said very quietly, "should you hate him?"

She clenched her hands and caught her breath, and again there was silence for a brief space.

"No," she said at last, "I am not his judge."

"I thought not," he answered, "yet you ought to. He behaved like a scoundrel and a cad."

"Hush!" she interrupted. "It is over now; there is no need to say it. What happened is between him and me."

"That is where you are wrong," he said. "It should be beneath you to think of him in any other way. It is the mistake good women make. They will shield their broken idols."

She bit her lips but did not reply for a few minutes. At last she said:

"Perhaps it is not possible for a man to understand a woman's love."

Again a long pause followed, and each wrestled with his own heart.

Back to the woman, as if no sad years had intervened, came the memory of her old anguish. Fresh as yesterday seemed the cruel awakening, the hopeless despair, the first crushing sense of the helplessness of womanhood.

She had smoothed it all over since, that few eyes might discern the scar; learnt to smile and be merry in spite of it. But there had been that about her ever since which withheld both men and women from being too friendly, or daring to intrude upon her reserve, though all the time her heart ached for sympathy and companionship; and this for the first time Lindsay Gibson had given her.

In the short space that she had known him she had found in his nature that which could satisfy her own. Already a new vista of happiness had been opened to her; she had stepped into the soft light of a glad possibility. But now, for a few minutes, the old anguish remained uppermost, and the past blotted out the present.

And Lindsay Gibson sat forward with his eyes on the ground, while a mental conflict waged within him. He had said he had no ideals, but he had been deceiving himself, for in reality this girl beside him embodied his highest—the ideal of how a woman could love. But it was in her past, and there for him lay a fatal barrier.

At last he turned to her, and the hush of the night grew deeper and the trees stayed their whispering.

"They say a woman never loves twice," he said with slow, questioning emphasis.

"She never does," was the low, strained answer, for the past still held her in a cruel grip, and, all-unknowing and all-unguarded, she spoke her own doom.

Then followed silence, broken only by the wind that murmured through the trees like the sound of a long-drawn sigh.

A short time afterwards they were back in the ball-room, and with a low bow he left her in the care of her next partner. But the flush had gone from her cheeks and the light from her eyes, and she moved as one dazed or in a dream.

When the ball was over she saw him once again, and his face was very grave, almost stern. She was waiting with her sister for their carriage, and he came up to her to say good-bye.

"I shall not see you again," he concluded, "as I am leaving Benly to-morrow. In a few days I shall go abroad."

She gave him her hand, and he held it a moment.

"Good-bye," he said. "I shall always be glad that I met you, and I shall not forget what you said. If at the end I have an ideal that has weathered the storms of existence I shall have to thank you for it."

"Good-bye," she answered very quietly.

Then she saw him walk away through the darkness.

GERTRUDE PAGE.

"THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM on TOP."

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HOMESPUN YARNS.

By Levin Carnac.

VII.—A FATAL MISFIT.

Two or three years ago I was making a solitary walking tour down the valley of the Weser, from the quaint little town of Bückeburg to the old-time city of Hamelin, known to all men as the home of the famous Piper who took the children with him to fairyland over the Klüt-Berg.

It was a good month before the regular tourist season began, and so I had the "Guest House"—to use the good old German word—to myself at the different villages at which I stopped on my way through the hill-country of the Deister.

At one of these halting-places, however—a big, straggling village that the Prussians had just promoted to the rank and dignity of a post-town—I met a fellow-wanderer, who, like myself, was taking his pleasure apart from the crowd.

I had just settled myself down to supper in the guest-chamber of the best-looking inn in the place, when the door opened, and a well-built, fair young fellow, clad in grey tweeds, and with knapsack on back and stick in hand, walked in and glanced round the room with that queer, half-lost look, by which you can always tell an Englishman abroad for the first time.

He was followed a moment after by the host, and at once proceeded, with an Englishman's usual disregard of the confusion of tongues, to order his supper in excellent, undiluted English, the host replying in almost equally pure German.

I, of course, took the liberty of introducing myself and disentangling the verbal muddle. This done, I invited the new-comer to sup with me, and so began a companionship which lasted till the end of my trip.

My new acquaintance was a young barrister who had started out on a walking tour with a friend who had undertaken to act as interpreter, but who had been called back to England the day before on urgent business. Hence the awkward position from which I had rescued him.

When we started on our way the next morning, having exchanged personal particulars overnight, I turned the conversation on to law and crime in the not unpardonable hope of getting something out of a lawyer for nothing. I succeeded very fairly, for my friend was still rather proud than otherwise of his profession, and therefore quite willing to talk about it.

What I wanted was a story by the wayside, and so I proposed that we should exchange yarns, he leading off with the story of his most curious legal experience.

He agreed, and this is how he kept his part of the contract:

"My own practice, such as it is, is confined to the Common Law, but I have had one criminal case, and that was about as singular an affair as any Old Bailey counsel could well have come across.

"It is about four years ago now, and briefs were few and far between with me then. I hadn't had one for nearly a month, and was sitting one afternoon in my chambers, wondering when the next was going to turn up, when a telegram came in and sent me flying off home as fast as a hansom could carry me. The wire was from an old schoolfellow, and one of the few real friends that had so far crossed my path. The words of the message were:

"'I have been arrested for murder. Come at once.'

"The address was Exeter gaol. I just caught the three forty-five from Paddington, and by half-past seven I was listening to my friend's story in the cell. The crime of which he was accused was even worse than murder, for his own father was the victim.

"The particulars he gave me were terribly bald, and to anyone but an old friend they would have been anything but conducive to a belief in his innocence.

"The night before he had gone out for a long walk according to a habit of his with which I was well acquainted, and had got home between eleven and twelve. Not feeling inclined to go to bed, he went upstairs to the library to get a book, and on his way passed the open door of his father's study. The old gentleman was sitting at his table as he passed, and wished him 'Good-night,' thinking he was going to bed.

"He remained for about an hour in the library; and as he passed the study door on his way to bed, he noticed that it was shut, and that the light was out. He had heard nothing unusual during the time he was in the library.

"The next morning the housekeeper roused him about seven and horrified him by telling him that his father had been found dead in his library chair. A doctor was at once sent for, and a very brief examination of the body convinced him that there had been foul play and that the old gentleman had been strangled from behind as he sat at his table writing. The strangling had been done with a silk handkerchief which lay beside the body when the crime was discovered, and that handkerchief bore my friend Fred's initial in the corner.

"He at once said that he remembered leaving it in the study the day before, and to him it was clear that the assassin had found it and used it as the most silent and effective weapon at hand. The police, however, had told him to keep that story with the other one about his nocturnal walk for the magistrates, and arrested him on the circumstantial evidence. He had been before the magistrate that day and the case had been adjourned for my attendance.

"I ought to add that robbery had evidently been the motive for the crime, whoever had committed it, for the murdered man's writing-table drawers had all been forced, and a small safe in the library had been opened with the key, and altogether nearly £300 in notes and gold was missing.

"The following day my friend was committed for trial, 'reserving his defence.' As a matter of fact the poor fellow had no defence to reserve. There was no clue to any other solution of the mystery than his guilt, and, worse than all, it was well-known that he had lately incurred debts which his father had refused to pay. The only link lacking in the fatally short chain of circumstantial evidence was the failure of the police to trace any of the stolen money to him. It had apparently

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His father had been found dead in his library chair.

vanished into thin air. This, however, was but small consolation either to him or to me.

"The sessions came on in about ten days, and during that time I hardly slept, so incessantly was my brain working to discover some clue that would point away from my friend, in whose innocence, in spite of appearances, I firmly believed.

"At length, on the day before the trial, a last despairing search in the library resulted in my finding a shred of fustian caught in the casement of a window opening on to a verandah. In an instant I was out on the sloping roof, examining every tile down to the water-pipe. Sticking on to this I found another larger shred of the same fustian, and in the pipe itself a horn coat button.

"This was something. Indeed it was much. But it was hardly enough to make a defence that would counteract the terribly direct evidence against the accused. I therefore kept my discoveries to myself, and thought away harder than ever.

"The case before ours was one of house-breaking. Curiously enough, on the very night of the murder, a diamond pane of glass had been removed from the window of a house occupied by an old man reputed to be a miser, and the burglar had put his hand through this, opened the window, and so entered the house.

"The accused was a big brawny fellow, his hands hung over the edge of the dock, and I was particularly struck with their immense size. To the astonishment of the court, and the disgust of the solicitor retained to defend him, he brought the case to a sudden stop by pleading guilty. He got twelve months, and as he was leaving the dock an idea struck me that brought my heart into my mouth, and in an instant I saw my way clear before me.

"Fred's case came next. The prosecuting counsel made his opening speech and called his witnesses. I cross-examined none of them, but waited anxiously for the return of a messenger I had sent to bring me the lead frame of the diamond pane at any price. The last witness had just stood down as he came and put it into my hand. When I rose to begin the defence, I astonished everybody in the court by asking that the last prisoner should be brought back and placed in the witness-box. To all objections I simply replied:

"'The life of my client and the clearing up of this crime depend upon what I ask being done.'

"At last I got my own way, and the burglar was brought back. I only asked him three questions, but they were enough. They were these:

"'How did you open the window in —— Street?'

"'By putting my hand through the pane I took out.'

"'How did you lose that button off your coat?'

"'Climbing through a hedge a fortnight ago.'

"'Did you ever fall off a verandah, and try to save yourself by catching at the waters, out?'

"At each question the man grew whiter, and more uncomfortable. At the last one, he opened his mouth to speak, but only an indistinct gurgle came forth.

"Then I produced the lead frame, and the two shreds of fustian, and the button, and addressed the Court with them in my hand. This is something like what I said:

"'The man in the witness-box has pleaded guilty to a crime that he did not commit, in order to conceal his guilt in a far graver one. He says that he opened the window in ——Street, by putting his hand through the place he had taken the pane out of. Here is the identical leaden frame. Let me see him put his hand through it.'

"It was handed up, and, as the man put out his hand to make the trial, he drew it back, and staggered with staring eyes, to the rear of the box. It was evident, at a glance, that he could not even have put all his fingers through it.

"'Now, see if this is the button you lost in the hedge. I found it in the water-pipe of the verandah outside Mr. Tressillan's library window, in the frame of which I also found this shred of stuff, which I think matches your coat.'

"As I spoke, the wretched man put his great hands to his face and sobbed out, 'Heaven forgive me! Yes, I did it. Take me away.'

"Three weeks later, one morning, at eight o'clock, Fred called me into his bedroom and pointed through the window to the black flag floating over the gaol wall. He put his hand on my shoulder, and said with a shudder:

"'But for you, old man, that flag would be flying for me.'"

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LOVED TOO WELL.

SURELY this was a dull town, if there ever was one.

The walking gentleman swore below his breath, and the low comedian got out between the acts and regaled himself with too much beer. It was raining outside, and the roof of the "opera-house" of Walapong leaked in places.

The company had been doing one-night pitches, and they wanted to know "why the advance agent had booked them for two nights in this hole."

Half of the properties and costumes had not arrived, and the leading lady walked on, in the runaway scene, with her travelling-ulster thrown over her ball-dress, instead of the white-and-gold Canton flannel imitation of a gorgeous opera-cloak which she should have worn.

She walked on, as it has been said. Properly, she should have rushed on. But, for this handful of top-booted men, who whistled and stamped, and used bad language as a regular vocabulary, what was the use of giving one's self any trouble? The audience would not know the difference.

This, on general principles, was the great fault of the leading lady. She was rather too prone not to think it worth while to take trouble. She and the manager had had words more than once. He had threatened to replace her. She had laughed in a cool and impertinent way she had.

"It would not be quite easy to replace me," she said.

For the rest, she shrugged her shoulders. What did she care?

She sauntered to the footlights now to deliver one of her speeches. Her pencilled eyes leisurely swept the audience. At one bench they became arrested.

He was there again.

"He" was a mere youth. Or, who knows?—perhaps he was not so young. He had one of those absurdly ingenuous visages that never grow old. This was the leading lady's thought of him. He had taken his seat quite in the background to-night, as if ashamed of his insistence—afraid of being caught at his post again.

This time the actress looked at him attentive y, while she went mechanically through her thrilling dialogue with the heavy villain. His eyes devoured her. He had the ecstatic mien of a devotee before a saint. The leading lady had not always been a member of a "travelling company." She had a different part behind her. It was not a new thing in her life to be looked at as this wild-looking Australian stockman was now doing, for he was probably a stockman; she did not know or care. She had only begun to notice him after his pleading, rapt eyes had encountered hers night after night, and she had awakened to a perception that he was following the company from place to place. The woman was no longer in her first youth. Much experience was hers. She recognised the look in the suppositious stockman's wide-open blue eyes as denoting that rarest thing in nature, an absolutely self-abnegating passion.

From then on she began to take a certain half-amused, half-commiserating interest in him. And to-night, if he were at his usual post when the actors went out—he usually lingered to the last, humbly in the background until she left the house, and then followed her and the rest to their hotel—it went through her mind that she would speak to him.

He was at his usual post near the door. And she spoke to him. He stood speechless before her as if the heavens had opened upon him.

"I suppose you want to know me," she said, studying him carelessly with the great worn-looking eyes, whose size was further increased by the dark lines round them. "I've noticed your fidelity. It is uncommon enough to be rather amusing. I warn you that I am not at all the sort of woman you will get any joy from knowing. But come and see me to-morrow, if you care to make the trial."

She left him standing there.

The following day he appeared at the two-storey building which constituted the hotel of the town.

Melanie—such was the name he had learnt to know her by from the bills—received him in a bare room, with the crude daylight pouring in. Hers was a face whose beauty had been ravished by something more than time. But there was still something about her that made her unlike all other women.

"What is your name?" she said to her visitor.

"Conrad Kepler."

"Well, then, Conrad Kepler, you are doing a foolish thing to fall in love with me. I see that you really do love me. And it is folly, harmful folly to you. Why

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waste your time following me from place to place? Go back to the pretty, innocent, fresh young girl who loves you. I am sure there is such a one. Marry her, settle down on your farm, and be happy. You have nothing to do with such as I am."

"I love you," said Conrad Kepler.

"You love the paint, and the powder, and the cheap finery and paste diamonds, and the poses I take, and the shrieks I give when my lover deserts me. You are unsophisticated, and you love all that."

"I love *you*," the young man insisted quietly.

"I thought it only kind to let you come here that you might see me as I am."

"I love you." This was Conrad Kepler's only answer.

* * * * *

The company had moved on to still another town. The places were so alike the name scarcely seemed to matter. And Conrad Kepler, dogged, humble, asking nothing, content with his unrequited adoration, with a chance crumb, had followed the company again.

One day the low comedian permitted himself a bibulous joke on the subject. Melanie gave him a look that silenced him. She was not liked by her associates, but she was rarely molested. It appeared tacitly agreed that she should be allowed to go her own way.

That same afternoon she said to Kepler:

"All this must cease. I was indifferent as to what you did at first. I did not care about you one way or the other. But now I have a friendship for you. To love you would be an absurdity. I shall never love any one. All that is dead and the ashes have covered it. I never had a brother. But I feel that you would not have done badly for one. I like you. I must respect your feelings. You force me to do so. And, liking you and respecting you, I tell you, once for all, to waste no more time on me. Go back to your home, to your friends, to the girl who loves you."

"I can't go back," was the reply. "I can only tell you one thing—I love you."

"Why?" she demanded impatiently.

"You are beautiful——"

She laughed.

"Not now!"

"You are beautiful to me," he went on, unabashed, "as the sun and stars. I never knew what life meant till I saw you that first night. After that it was fatal. You may say or do as you like. I must love you. I can't help it. Yes, it is fate."

She had been pacing the room all day restlessly. All day she had been restless. The ghost of the bygone past had risen out of its shallow grave. That morning as she stood at the window a man had walked by on the other side of the rough, glaring mining-town street. She had but seen the back of his shoulders—a certain turn of the neck. But how the spectral memories rushed back! It was only a chance resemblance, of course. But, oh, fool! How could she have cheated herself with the thought that she was turning to stone, becoming senseless, incapable of the old wild throb, the old wild agony? Just a chance resemblance, and it had awakened this tumult of soul.

"Soul!" she repeated to herself with a bitter, inward laugh. "I did not know I had one. That's dead, too. He had none, that's certain, and he killed mine."

Now, abruptly, she stopped before Conrad Kepler. A strange thought had flashed upon her—had taken possession of her. Her great eyes held his with a new power.

"I wonder if you really love me, and how much?" she said, more to herself than to him.

"Yes, I love you," he murmured. To him it was the simplest thing on earth.

"How much?" she repeated, a sombre fire beginning to burn in her eyes, a little tremor quivering in her thin nostril. "How much? Enough to die for me? Enough to kill—to kill for me?"

She held her breath as if suspended. Breathless, too, Conrad Kepler looked at her. What did she mean? He did not know. But, without hesitancy, he answered:

"Yes."

"You would kill a man whom I might point out to you, saying: 'That man wronged me, that man murdered me, morally and mentally: took the joy of life from me for ever. That man I hate with an undying hatred. Avenge me! Kill him!' You would do that?"

She fell back from him, her features relaxing, her fingers trembling.

"Yes."

"You are a phenomenon of devotion!" she exclaimed with a harsh, discordant laugh. "You are one of the wonders of the world. But possess your soul in peace. I shall ask no such service of you."

* * * * *

She had thought it a chance resemblance. It was not that. That same night, in the midst of the play, Melanie saw him—the only man she had ever loved; the man who, years before, had induced her to marry him, only that she might learn that he had another wife.

She had left him, asking herself what she should do with her ruined life. She had beauty; some talent. She went on the stage. But the springs of all hope, all endeavour, were broken. She did not try to rise. What use? She could live after a fashion for a few years. At the worst, life was not long. And at the end there was the peace and rest of death. Thus she had said within her own soul. And eight years had passed. And now, for the first time, across the flaring footlights, on the outskirts of civilisation, his steady eyes met hers.

Conrad Kepler's rapt, unwavering glance, from another part of the hall, followed her every motion. But Melanie, on this night, knew not even that he was there.

The following day he went to her hotel. She had gone out, he was told. The company were to move on late that night.

The young man followed the direction indicated to him, and which the actress had taken on leaving the hotel. It led him to a stony, level space on the confines of the town. Arrived there he paused abruptly, and remained rooted to the spot. Beyond the unfinished brick wall of a house, which had been hastily run up, and left uncompleted, and which now screened his own figure from view, there stood, in relief against the evening sky, two forms—Melanie and a man.

The man appeared to plead, to urge, to insist. The woman whom Conrad Kepler loved stood regarding him with folded arms; the pose of her head, the rigidity of her body, were eloquent of contempt, of speechless, quivering rage.

Then she turned, he following, and moved away, walking quickly in the direction of the unfinished building. Conrad Kepler, as they approached, drew

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further back. They did not see him. There was a look upon the woman's face that he had never seen there before. Still the man appeared to urge, to plead. He was handsome; he had the air of a man of the world. Then, quite near the screening wall, Melanie for an instant stopped. Conrad Kepler could not see her face now, but he could divine its expression by the ringing, yet trembling, tone of her voice.

"Love you! You speak of love now—now? What do you know of it? What did you know of it eight years ago? Love means truth. Do you know what truth means, even? No! Had you killed me, in the body, you would have wronged me less. My heart, my soul, all that was vital in me you did kill. Your oaths betrayed, defiled. Better death a thousand times than the hurt you did to me!"

She had hurried on again, the man still at her side; but Conrad Kepler had not moved.

After an interval of which he knew not the duration, he stirred. Night had fallen, only where the sun had set the sky still burnt dully, like a reflection of distant camp fires.

* * * * *

In the hotel there was confusion. The theatrical company were preparing to leave. No one noticed a slight, boyish-looking man pass up the stairs. He asked for no one, but in a few minutes he stood before a door and entered.

Melanie was alone in the room. She turned swiftly. Some great change had been wrought in her since Conrad Kepler had seen her last. But he observed nothing. His eyes were set and glassy.

"I am glad you came. I have something to tell you with my good-bye——"

"I, too, have something to tell you," he said, interrupting.

And now she had been struck with something strange about him.

"What?" Her lips just formed the word.

"I have killed him."

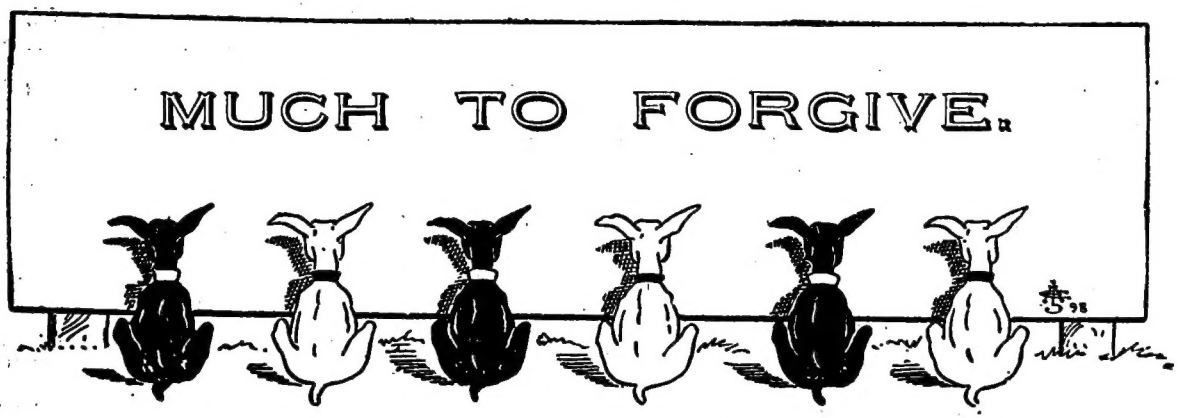
She did not shriek. She tried twice to speak.

"I have killed him. I heard you this evening; then I knew what you meant yesterday. I laid in wait for him after he left you—left this house—an hour ago. I followed him. It is done now—all done."

Then words came to her, and a laugh that was worse than sobs.

"Fool! fool!" she shrieked. "I loved him in spite of all. The woman who stood between us is dead, and I promised at last, before he left me just now, to forgive all and to marry him to-morrow."

E. Thorpe.



The little Prussian farm was not more than six acres square. A narrow road bordered it on the west and a neighbour's meadow on the east.

The stump of a gigantic poplar crumbled to decay upon the dividing line. Round it, grey and sodden, lay the chips that had flown at its downfall, and remnants of two fences, one in fairly good repair, the other broken to splinters.

A path ran up from the road to the gate, which was white, in a row of pointed palings, and a green walk under an arbour reached the house. There was a window right and left and two doors, side by side, in the porch. One sacred to Sundays and cleaning days, the other to rare visitors during the week. As a rule, people were expected to go round to the kitchen and not make footmarks on the carpet.

Cat'rina was small and slight. There was a dull red in her face; her nose slanted upward and the corners of her thin lips drooped

She kept the rugs turned face downwards, to prevent their fading, and the table-cover wrong side out. The sewing-machine was swathed in white, and there were pieces of newspaper folded and laid between the door and the threshold to keep out the dust.

On Saturday she reversed the rugs and the cover in mute concession to Sunday, and on Sunday she opened the window and unlocked the door of the room, which had a fairly good carpet, a sofa, an easy chair with a tidy, and a centre table upon which lay the Bible and a hymn book. She put on her best frock, her earrings and an amethyst ring, and sat, as the weather permitted, on the porch or at the window to wait for Lewis Eisenoch.

She had done this for the last five years.

Conrad Grau never affected the room. Even when Eisenoch was driven to propose for Cat'rina, because the matter must be settled somehow and Cat'rina refused to follow his suggestion and ask her father herself, he went round to the kitchen.

Cat'rina watched him off the porch before she ran within and whispered to her mother.

Mrs. Grau nodded many times and smiled ecstatically.

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Both women tip-toed into the kitchen and pushed their bodies into the angle formed by the half-open door. Through the long space between the door and the lintel they could see and hear. Cat'rina dropped on her knees that her mother might peep over her head.

It was but a little way from the front to the kitchen. The path ran between the end of the house and the garden. Eisenoch stopped to look over the palings at the rows of turnips and carrots and cabbages like bouquets.

Five steps led from the kitchen porch to a paved court. Above it a vine, heavy with fruit, made a purple stalactited ceiling. There was enough red light slanting from above the trees to enable Conrad Grau to read the paper which he held across his knees. He followed every line from right to left and from left to right with a horny forefinger.

Eisenoch said good evening.

Grau read audibly to the end of the paragraph and cleared his throat. He did not raise his eyes. He knew why the young man was there. With this end in view he had been negatively polite for a number of years.

The vision of a poplar passed before his eyes, green in June, lying shorn in November across the meadow. He remembered how twelve good men and true decided not one, but many times, that the poplar had not stood within his boundary lines; therefore must he pay to Johannes Eisenoch the value of the tree and the cost of the several suits.

Finally he remembered how he had been compelled to count out his small hoard of money and confess himself beaten.

Herein lay the gall and wormwood. Now he might cancel a portion of the debt.

Eisenoch shifted his position and made a mighty effort.

"I have been keeping company with your Cat'rina these five years," he said. "My father left me the farm. I've got two horses and a couple o' cows, with the heifer coming on, and six as fine pigs as any in the country, ready for killing. They ain't half starved either. Everything's got plenty to eat."

Grau went on with his reading.

"I held my oats back and they'll bring a pretty penny. I've got as fine a lot o' cabbages as you can see in a week's march. Nobody's can come near 'em, and cabbages'll bring a good price before the winter's over. Cabbage is scarce."

He looked down the path that zig-zagged over the hill to the dairy and waited for some evidence of approval. Finally he said:

"You know this, and never had nothing to say against my coming round these five year yet, so I thought you'd just as soon me and Cat'rina should be married about the middle of October?"

A rage seized Grau; it strained his joints and wrenched his muscles. The paper across his knees shook; but he followed with his great forefinger every line from left to right, from right to left.

He looked slowly from the extreme corners of his eyes, and said with guarded scorn that had been waiting for years for expression:

"Your father was a rascal and your mother was a fool. I shall keep my Cat'rina for a better man."

It was good to pay off the debt he owed Eisenoch to Eisenoch's son.

Left to himself he continued to read, though the shaded spot grew dim and the letters on the page became indistinguishable.

The women behind the door stole back into the room and looked at each other. Through the dusk Cat'rina saw her mother lift her hands and close her eyes; she saw her open her mouth to its widest and move her head backwards and forwards in a slow, vibratory fashion, as if she never intended to leave off.

They said not a word to each other as they closed the windows and locked the door, and Cat'rina turned all the rugs face downwards and swathed the sewing machine in its cotton cover.

Although there had been the finality of few words about Grau's decision, Eisenoch did not discontinue his visits at once. For several evenings he sat in the yellow chair on the porch while Cat'rina's father read the paper before the kitchen door.

What was the good of Eisenoch's keeping company with Cat'rina if he was never to marry her?

Cat'rina herself saw it in this light.

She mentioned the subject one last Sunday evening and made it easy for him to get away.

It had rained in the night: the clouds were still heavy. The young chestnut wood had shed its leaves until the road was yellow with them. The drops that splashed from the branches were the only sound in the stillness.

Cat'rina leant on the gate and said:

"It's no more use our going on like this. I've been thinking this morning about the other girls. I expect you have been thinking about them yourself?"

"Not particular," Eisenoch admitted.

"There's Rosa and Carolina and Maria and Louisa."

She told them off one by one upon the palings of the gate.

"They're all good girls—good, industrious girls. Maria seems to me the best for a wife."

Eisenoch took up the list:

"Rosa's a pretty girl," he said; "so's Carolina."

"They're young. You can't tell how they're going to turn out—these young girls."

"What do you think of Louisa?"

"She's got a temper. You can't get a word out of her when she's sulky."

Eisenoch was afraid of a girl with a temper.

"There's the Reizer girls."

"Neither of 'em makes good butter. Dealers tell you that Reizer's butter always fetches less in the market than other people's. They let their cream get musty. But they're nice girls. Now, there's Anna. Have you thought of Anna?"

Anna was stolid and colourless. Her hair was scant; her pale eyes were expressionless.

Eisenoch had not thought of Anna.

Cat'rina became enthusiastic. She said there wasn't a girl in the place that could compare with Anna. She had the wash out every Monday morning, rain or shine, by eight o'clock, and the Lenzes had a big family to wash for. She was a good housekeeper—her dairy was neat as as a new pin.

"Hart gets the same for her butter as he gets for mine."

Eisenoch was not interested. No man was interested in Anna.

"What do you think of Sophie?"

Cat'rina had a vision of red cheeks and redder lips, of smiles and dimples and abundant black locks.

Sophie was her dearest friend. For years she had patronised her, and told her all her plans and prospects for a wedding, and Sophie had been agreeably, acceptably jealous.

She felt a pang of mingled anger and jealousy.

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She could not say "Long live the Queen" to this successor.

Eisenoch repeated his question:

"What do you thing of Sophie?"

"Sophie?" she stammered, "Sophie?"

She moved her head from side to side.

"Don't you think about Sophie," she said.

"No?"

"No."

He persisted stupidly:

"I always understood you thought a lot of Sophie."

"Nobody can say they ever heard me say a word against Sophie Hilweg."

"But you——"

"I don't think she's the wife for you—that's all. All the others suit you better. Anna suits you best of all. Anna's a good girl."

Eisenoch went down the path and turned as if he had forgotten something.

"It's not worth while to think about Sophie?"

"No; besides——"

"What?" asked Eisenoch.

He sprang up the path and took hold of the palings.

Cat'rina hesitated.

"They say the young preacher in the next village is beginning to pay her attentions. They've taken him home to dinner twice this summer already. I don't say it's true, I only heard so. You think about Anna."

At night, Eisenoch thought so much of Sophie that he found it difficult to sleep. He hated the problematic preacher.

In the morning he went over to her father's house to buy corn, though he had plenty.

Early as it was, Sophie's tub was empty. She had pinned up her skirts and stood on tip-toe—she was not tall—to fasten a sheet upon the line. Her arms were round and white, her hair was black, she se med so altogether desirable that Eisenoch could scarcely prevent himself from taking her round the waist and telling her at once of the honour he had come to confer upon her, particularly when she turned her face over her shoulder and all her smiles and dimples appeared for him.

She said:

"When did you see Cat'rina last?"

He replied:

"I come over to see if your father had a little of last year's corn. I've got a young horse over there I don't like to feed on new corn." After a pause he said: "Cat'rina—Cat'rina, what makes you always say that same thing to me about Cat'rina?"

He made a long explanation while Sophie listened or laughed encouragingly.

They were married a month later.

Cat'rina went to the wedding in a new gown and gave the bride two glass butter dishes. She gave two because she wished to avoid any possible imputation of jealousy.

Time passed on.

Sophie's boys and girls became men and women who passed and repassed her gate co tinually.

Cat'rina grew middle-aged and grey-haired. Her father was an old man. A wordless devotion sprang up between them. Each was eager to serve the other, but gradually his tasks became her own.

One morning Cat'rina came in from milking to find his chair by the fire unoccupied and the voice of the clock like a menace in the empty room.

When she called there was no answer.

A truth she had never acknowledged took hold of her and a horror of loneliness came upon her.

As she mounted the stairs the sun came up from behind the young chestnut wood, and its rays shone red on the bare white wall.

Old Grau lay long and straight upon his bed. His hands were clasped in a knotted heap on his breast. The feeble strength of old age had gone from him.

When he saw Cat'rina at the head of the staircase his mouth quivered.

"Oh, Cat'rina," he said, "you poor girl!"

He began to talk incoherent y.

"You must be left by yourself. In the night I know it, and I think of you by yourself here, all alone. And I think about the poplar and Eisenoch's son."

For a moment, while they looked at each other, their relationship was forgotten. They were just two human creatures, and one had satisfied his enmity at the expense of the other, and learnt how bitter such satisfaction is at the last.

Cat'rina crossed the room and knelt down by the bed. She laid her hard hands over her father's.

"When I think of all I did to spite Eisenoch, and him dead already, and that it only spited you, why, then, I know you've had much to forgive, Cat'rina."

As she looked from the barrenness of the past to the loneliness of the future, Cat'rina, for the first time, knew how much she had forgiven.

ELGA DENET.

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Each application must be made separately.

Result of the First Distribution appears on page 556.

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TWO GOOD MEN AND TRUE.

Joe and Jim had been partners for years. They had travelled to the gold fields together, built their little cabin among the first on Kangaroo Creek, shared the same board and luck. They had seen a few rough cabins grow into an important camp; they had seen pistols drawn and lives threatened and taken almost daily in their times, when a six-shooter was the only court of justice, and he shot best who shot first.

Life was rough at Kangaroo Creek in those days, and even now, when it was a thriving little settlement, it was often a case of "kill or be killed."

One night Joe and Jim had sat talking with a miner whose claim adjoined their own—"Piggie," they called him, and if ever he bore other name none at Kangaroo Creek knew it. "Piggie" was reputed to have been a gentleman before he came to Australia, and his talk was different from most of the boys, and his hands were smaller and whiter. "Piggie" had made his pile and was going away the next day, going home; and Jim and Joe found his body floating in the creek in the morning, with staring, half open eyes and a knife in his back. They buried him silently by the creek.

"Pity," said Jim.

"So 'tis," agreed Joe.

And Joe and Jim guarded their own little hoard a bit more carefully and kept their fire-arms in better condition.

It was almost time for Jim and Joe to leave the diggings. They had worked there six long, weary years, and had their share of luck. They had risen together with the sun, toiled side by side day after day, shared their evening meal, and drank and smoked together with little variation. They seldom spoke, yet closer friends never shared luck.

Over a bottle of liquor they talked about returning together, but after three hours' tacit and smokeful deliberation, and ten minutes' earnest discussion, they decided to hang on for another year.

"We shall have enough by then," said Joe.

"I should say so," replied Jim.

And so it was agreed.

The arrival in the village of a woman ruffled the even tenor of their companionship. Nothing could have parted Jim and Joe for one moment except an explosion or—a woman. Men may hob-nob together for a lifetime, but bring a woman on the scene and trouble begins.

She was a giggling, fair-haired thing, the first barmaid at the Palace Hotel, the one "pub" at Kangaroo Creek.

She was a woman, and it was this fact that struck the sleepy minds of Joe and Jim. Hitherto the customers of the reeking little canteen had been attended to by men like themselves—bare-armed, grimy, perspiring. The two partners began to find a vague attraction in spending their evenings there, and watching Nellie flit about through clouds of smoke.

Jim would even leave his work in the middle of the day, and Joe would ponder earnestly as to where he could be, while Joe would occasionally saunter out at odd times without even saying "Coming?" to Jim. All of which was getting very serious and unaccountable. But each man kept his secret, and talked less and smoked more than ever.

One evening, the first for many, they were passing in their own little den. It certainly was a rough night without, and the men were, as they confessed, "dog-tired"; but perhaps the real reason for their domesticity was the fact that "Nellie" had left the diggings for a few days on a visit.

They put the bottle on the table, and lighted their pipes; Joe and Jim sat as usual, gazing earnestly into the fire.

"Did well to-day," suggested Joe.

"Very well," agreed Jim.

The two puffed on in silence, each eager to unburden himself of some secret, but uneasy as to how to start.

"Nice gal, Nell," Joe remarked at length.

"So she is," agreed Jim.

"I got a kind o' surprise fer yer," said Joe after a few minutes of silent puffing.

"Oh!" was all Jim said.

Joe hesitated, but at last summoned up courage and blurted out:

"Jim, I'm going ter marry a gal."

"You is?" said Jim after a pause. "Have you made up to her and asked her, Joe?"

"Not yet; but I kissed her good-bye last night."

"So did I," said Jim looking up.

"You're a liar, Jim!"

Jim did not answer, but filled up the glasses again, and they both gazed stupidly into the fire.

"I've her portrait here somewhere," said Jim at length, producing a photograph.

"Why, so have I," replied Joe, taking out another.

Both men paused; then Joe said firmly:

"I mean ter get her, Jim!"

"Not if I know it! She is promised to me," replied Jim with equal firmness.

"So you've been sneaking after 'er, Jim?" asked Joe.

"No worse than you," replied Jim candidly.

"What do you mean, Jim?" asked Joe.

"What I says, Joe," answered Jim.

Another very serious pause.

"See here, Jim!"

"Well, Joe."

"You want that girl, I s'pose?"

"I do."

"Well, so do I—that's straight out."

"Then I s'pose we'd better settle it at once," said Jim.

"How, Jim?" asked Joe.

"Pistols," suggested Jim.

"Good," replied the other.

"Fust thing to-morrow, back o' the hill," proposed Jim, "and he best man wins."

"Right you are," acquiesced Joe.

"Good night, Joe."

"Good night, Jim."

The old partners were up at dawn as usual. Joe noticed with some concern that Jim searched for tobacco in his pouch and found none. Such a thing

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might, Joe reflected, put Jim at a disadvantage; he hastened to put the matter right.

"Hev some tobacco, Jim?"

"Thanks, Joe."

So they commenced their walk together. They were both dead shots. Neither would be likely to miss a coin at twenty yards, much less the sturdy breast that would soon be his target.

And on the way they reflected, as usual, each within his honest, slow mind.

"I could hit Jim, of course," Joe's thoughts ran; "I'd be a mug if I couldn't! But he is sure to pop me, too. That's no good to either. Besides, he's my old partner, is Jim, we've pigged in together now, how long is it? six years! No, I'll not down old Jim this time; 'tain't worth it. He's a better man than me, is Jim, and I shouldn't care to hang on alone if Jim was gone under, durn me if I should, not for all the women in the world!"

"Joe or me, one or the other; both, I spect," reflected Jim cheerily. "Poor Joe! It don't seem right somehow to stick an ounce of lead into him, after these times together, because he happens to fancy a girl, same's me. S'pose he did miss me—or only wing me—which he won't? Well—durn it—I shouldn't know who to talk to without Joe in the corner opposite, smokin' his pipe. No—I ain't goin' to murder old Joe—not just yet awhile."

They reached the place.

Joe held out his hand.

"Well, so long, Jim."

"So long, Joe."

The hand-grip was a long one—the voices were not quite as firm as usual. But Joe's eyes twinkled even now at the thought of the ingenious trick he was about to play on Jim by missing him; the corners of Jim's mouth twitched with merriment, as though he were conjuring up Joe's surprise presently at finding himself unhurt.

But each felt, with the utmost certainty, that he had only a few seconds longer to live.

They took up their positions.

Through the trees the wind whistled and snarled, the dripping of the rain on the foliage above them was the only sound.

Joe particularly noticed an irritating flapping leaf, almost over Jim's head; Jim remarked that a squirrel was playing about in the tree beneath which Joe stood.

"Say when, Jim," suggested the ever-garrulous Joe.

"No—you," replied Jim.

Joe smiled broadly as he counted evenly:

"One—two—three—fire!"

The reports rang out. The squirrel dropped headless at Joe's feet; the leaf fluttered down on to the brim of Jim's hat. The men gazed at each other for a few moments; then they gradually understood how things were. The two began to laugh outright. The laugh increased steadily in volume, and was prolonged for five minutes.

Joe began the conversation.

"Well, Jim. We're durned fools, we are."

"I should think we is, Joe," agreed Jim.

They advanced to each other, and shook hands again.

"Confound you, Jim," said Joe warmly.

"An' you, too, Joe," replied Jim.

At last accounts Joe and Jim were still together—and still unmarried.

V. Hewitt.

Result of First Distribution.

Of the fifty persons selected in the first *Short Stories* Distribution, four have applied. A sovereign has, therefore, been sent to each of the following:

W. GYDE, The Barracks, Warley, Essex.

Miss WILLIAMS, Ivy Cottage, Rowlands Castle, Havant, Hants.

J. B. WIGHTON, 26 St. Domingo Vale, Everton.

G. R. CHALMERS, R.N., H.M.S. *Worcester*, Stationed off Greenhithe, Kent.

Here is a list of those people who would have received a sovereign each had they applied for it:

John Evison, West Street, Crowland, Peterborough; Daniel Smith, Harkstead, Suffolk; Miss Frankland, 6 Church Square, Whitby; Arthur Buckle, 7 Hawthorne Villas, Queen's Road, Wimbledon; James Carter, 21 Skinner Street, Swansea, South Wales; Miss Sayer, 31 St. Peter's Street, Ipswich; James Garnett, 113 Prospect Road, Scarborough; George Sadler, 6 Union Street, Norwich; Mrs. Stanmer, 11 Alexandra Road, Broadstairs; Joseph Avery, Railway Street, Barnes, S.W.; Miss Caroline Plumridge, 3 Foxton Terrace, Friar's Stile Road, Richmond; Miss Lily Strickland, 5 Chapel Road, Stamford Hill, N.; Frederick North, 10 Bath Street, Northampton; G. A. S. Vint, 11 Carlisle Street, Belfast; Thos. Peed, The Nurseries, Norwood Road, West Norwood, S.E.; W. P. Brigstocke, 1 The Terrace, Ryde, Isle of Wight; Miss Hickman, The Cottage, Hagley, Stourbridge; J. W. Somerton, 49 London Road, Worcester; Richard Wilson, 47 Railway Road, Leigh, Lancs.; D. Bevan, 19 Glover Street, Birkenhead; J. Hindle, Strand, Exmouth: R. Douglas, 48 George Street, Perth, Scotland; R. Gilmour, 12 Brougham Street, Greenock; Miss E. Ashford, 166 Icknield Street, Birmingham; Mrs. W. Morris, 17 Harrowby Street, Bute Docks, Cardiff; Miss L. Williams, 13 Mostyn Road, Brixton; Thos. Mantle, Trewen, The Woodlands, Conway, North Wales; E. Packman, 10 Arbroath Road, Dundee; W. Waymont, 53 Tierney Road, Streatham; R. J Henderson, 33 Hollybank Road, Drumcondra, Dublin; R. S. Lord, 16 Grange Avenue, Rawtenstall; John Bray, 189 North Road, Plymouth: Joseph Mayne, Forest, Redruth; John Morris, 35 Worsfield Street, Battersea; James Matthews, "The Elms," Newbury, Berks; Thos. Drew, 480 High Road, Chiswick; Joseph Percival, 166 Oldham Road, Ashton-under-Lyne; Miss L. Higgs, Andersontown, Falls Road, Belfast; Mrs. H. Rogers, 18 Barousfield Road, East Twickenham: H. Gillet, Gwithian, Hayle, Cornwall; Miss Emma Carter, 1 Dancer Road, Fulham, S.W.; Miss A. Sweet, 50 Portman Street, Rowbarton, Taunton; S. H. Gordon Able, Onecote School, Leek, Staffs.; D. Gilchrist, 29 West Scotland Street, Plantation, Glasgow; Harry Attree, 328 Uxbridge Road, W.

This is a very encouraging start, and readers must be commended upon their enterprise in applying in such large numbers. It may possibly so happen that those people whose names and addresses are given above as having failed to apply for the sovereign awaiting them are not readers of *Short Stories*, and it may with equal possibility happen that the list of persons selected for this week's distribution contains amongst them a good proportion of non-readers. Under these circumstances, it is to be hoped that every reader will mention the distribution to at least one friend, and put this friend in the way of making his application in the proper fashion. Who knows but what the name of your next door neighbour has been selected, and that he will fail to secure his golden sovereign simply because he is unaware of this generous offer? It behoves you, therefore, to mention the fact to everybody with whom you come in contact. It surely is not worth losing a sovereign for the sake of a post-card. Your name may not be amongst those who have been selected up to the present; on the other hand it may, and you would feel rather unhappy if on opening your *Short Stories* a week or two hence, you found that your name was down as one of those who would have received £1 had they applied for it!

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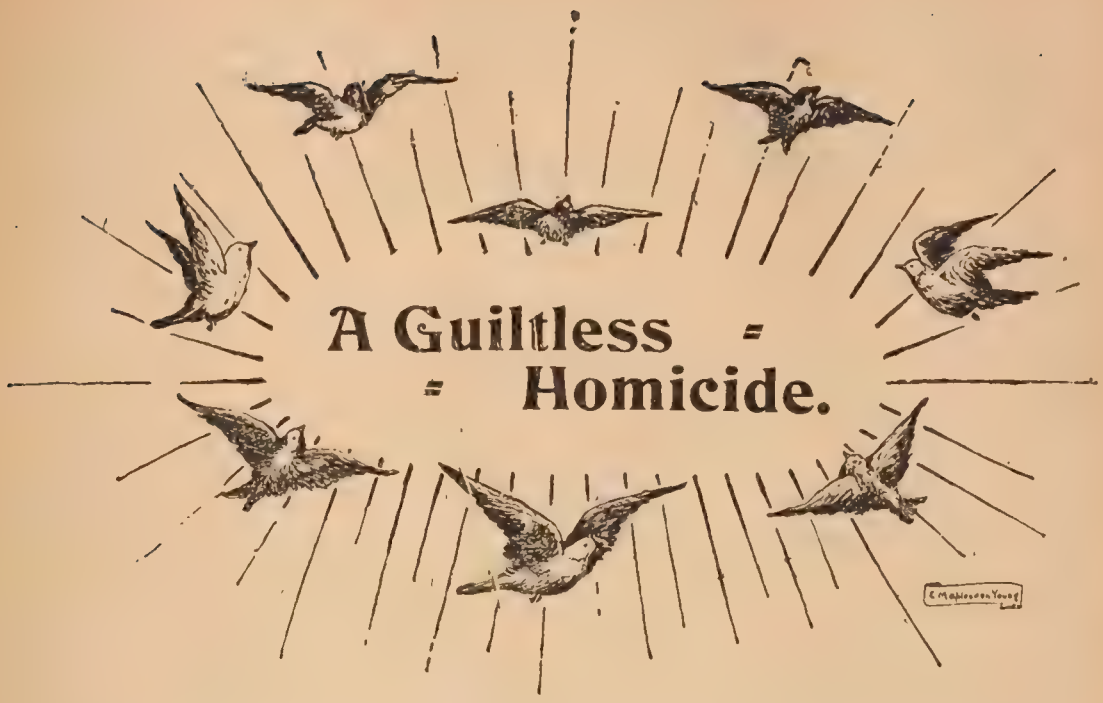

A Guiltless Homicide.

MALLORY felt himself almost slinking up the avenue. He could not escape the memories of the days when he had bounded between these trees as a boy, galloped up the hard, smooth road on horse-back, or come, later, as a young prince upon his own estate. The contrast of past and present made him feel the blood in his face, and sent a little shudder of disgust running down his spine.

There was resentment, too, against the old man that he felt had robbed him, not only of his prospects in life, but of his self-respect. Besides the droop in Mallory's shoulders, there were tears of self-pity in his eyes, which made him despise himself, and added to his anger against the old man up there in the house. Once let us get the idea that a thing is ours, by whatever chance or gift, and we consider it ours by unalienable right.

Mallory did not go to the front of the house. He hesitated for an instant at the side, and looked through the unshaded window and saw his old cousin, his only living relative, sitting as he had sat night after night for twenty years, with his books about him, reading, reading. The student lamp was old, and the shade of green paper threw a sickly light on the bony old face, with the thin lips a little drawn up at one corner, as if in a perpetual sneer. The eyes were small, with slanting, tent-like lids. How Mallory did hate the expression of that face! How many times had he given him nothing more than the most courteous and polite attention, and how he had writhed under it!

In the midst of his misery, and in the very act of turning about and going back to the gate, Mallory noticed with contempt the worn table cover, the green paper shade, and the shabby dressing gown that his cousin wore about his narrow shoulders. A man with a large fortune—more than a large fortune—to spend his life like that! And how old and pale he looked! He couldn't live long, and then that money, all the money that Mallory had been brought up to consider his very own, would go to a library that nobody would ever enter except dusty old men like this.

It seemed to him that he must prevent it. He walked rapidly round the house until he came to the back-kitchen door, which he tried. It was fastened, but there was a shuffle across the floor, and a hand on the lock.

"Who's there?" a strong voice asked.

"It's I, Grainger," Mallory said. "Let me in."

The door flew open instantly, showing a pleased and delighted face.

There was a hesitancy in the butler's look until Mallory held out his hand, and then Grainger grasped it in both of his with affection.

"I'm glad to see you home again, sir. I was just about to take a bit of supper, Mr. Mallory, and there's some as good devilled kidneys as you've seen since you were here before. You must taste 'em, sir."

Mallory was hungry, or he had been hungry, but it seemed to him that he must go in there to his cousin and say or do something to make him change his mind about leaving all that money to a stupid library. What good would libraries, or anything else, do old George Dent after he was dead? And here he was, starving, ragged, without a place to lay his head; he, a gentleman, who had been brought up to expect that one day all this would be his! It was cruel. It was wrong. His cousin must be made to see it.

Grainger went on preparing the table before him.

"The Mason family are back, sir," he said with his eye on the tin coffee-pot on the range.

With the smell of the kidneys and the coffee, and the sight of the white napkins, to which he had been unaccustomed in these last months, a sense of comfort came to Mallory to which he had been long a stranger.

But when Grainger mentioned the Masons, that ner-

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vous gnawing of impatience and protestation against fate began again in his heart.

"When?"

"Last week. I saw Miss Emily the day before yesterday. She asked me where you were, and I told her you was in France again, sir. I knew she would think it strange you would be in town and not come to see us. Wouldn't be stopping at the old place any longer, so I just told her you were in France. It seemed to me she seemed a bit disappointed."

"Don't tell her, Grainger. I rely upon you not to tell her. Do not tell anyone. I want you to promise me that no one shall ever know I am not in France. If I could go, I would go."

Mallory felt himself getting weak. He put his head down in his hands. The thought of Emily Mason added a new drop to his cup of misery. He had never been in love with her, but he had liked her, and had basked in her admiration of him. His cousin, fourteen months before, had called him in one day and told Mallory that he had given him home, education, opportunity, everything, and had found him at twenty-six only a good-for-nothing, mildly dissipated young man, as unfit as possible to manage and profitably use a great estate; that he considered his own duty discharged towards the young man by the past, and for the future his fortune would go where it would be of some service to humanity. He meant to endow a great and solid reference library for scholars like himself. And Mallory with sixty-four pounds and his large and handsome wardrobe, had been turned out into the world.

People did not know that he was not the old man's heir, and he might have made debts anywhere, but he knew that his cousin would stop that, as soon as he heard of it, in a public and humiliating fashion. He could not stand such a disgrace, so he dropped out of sight. He would not go to any of his old acquaintances for employment, and he could get none from other people. He was learned in nothing, save elegant and easy ways of spending money; and no man wanted a subordinate for that purpose.

The loss of Emily Mason had not been even a spot in his general misery. He had not thought of her till now, but now, for some reason, she seemed infinitely precious, infinitely above him, and he could not bear that she should know anything about him or his degradation.

"No danger o' my telling, Mr. Mallory," Grainger said, pouring the coffee into the cup. "I'm thinking Mr. Dent will repent, before he dies, of ever having made such an unjust will. It's only right that the estate should be your own. You ought to marry Miss Emily and settle down here in the old house, and let it be livened up again. It's no way to live, this way. Why, every night I lock Mr. Dent up in the house, and take the keys and leave him there until the morning, reading, reading. He won't let me even sleep in the house. It's no way for a Christian to live."

The odour of coffee gave Mallory a sickish sensation.

"Go and get me some brandy, Grainger. I am ill," he said, pushing away the food before him.

Grainger brought a bottle from his little bedroom.

"Here's some of the real stuff. There's only a few bottles of it left."

Mallory swallowed half a glassful, and sat for another quarter of an hour looking into the glowing face of the range. The brandy seemed to go clear into his eins, and race through them instead of the blood. He had not eaten since the night before. It had been days since he had had a respectable meal. That impelling desire to stop his cousin's determination to disinherit him before it should be made irrevocable by his death came back with redoubled force.

"I am going to see Cousin George," he said.

"That's right," Grainger replied, "that's right."

But he looked a little uneasy at the flushed face and disordered, soiled clothing.

Grainger loved Mallory, the impulsive, sweet-tempered, generous boy who had brought him all his troubles who had always been generous and generally considerate. He loved him as though he had been his son that had never been born. In the eyes of Grainger, Mallory had never been guilty of a wrong action in his life.

It only wrung the elder man's heart that he could not bear the young man's troubles—that he could not make things straight.

"Don't you think, Mr. Mallory, some clean linen—now, I've got plenty, if you'd but wear it. Mr. Dent——"

"Oh, hang his infernal ways!" Mallory cried. "I'm going in to tell him he shan't keep me out of my own. I'll spend half the estate in the courts. Do you lock him in? Where's the key?"

"Here it is. But I wouldn't go, feeling that way, Mr. Mallory, indeed I wouldn't. Wait awhile."

"I'm going now."

And taking the key, he strode across the flagged court between the outer kitchen and the house.

The wide halls were dark. There was no light in all the house, except the library. The old man slept in a room next to his books but Mallory knew every step of the way. He had lived there ever since he was ten years old.

When he reached the library door he hesitated for an instant, and then knocked.

"Come in," his cousin's voice said calmly.

The very tones of it took away all of Mallory's bravado. He opened the door and went in.

Mr. Dent looked up from the book in his delicate hands. Mallory stood, and when his cousin finally recognised him, he, too, arose and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Arthur?" he said coldly. "Will you have a chair? It seems to be a chilly evening." And he drew a light cane-chair towards the smouldering fire.

It was all so hopeless. Mallory had nothing to say. How could he sit there in his rags, a confessed failure, a man—an ablebodied man—who could not keep himself from starvation, and protest against a man who had piled scores of thousands of pounds upon each other by sheer hard work, leaving them as he chose?

Mallory felt the sneer in that face already. He knew that his cousin supposed he had come as a beggar, but hardly as such a colossal beggar.

He made up his mind that he would not ask anything of his cousin. He would explain this disordered dress by saying he had been hunting in the neighbourhood. Whatever he thought, he might think.

They went on talking of commonplaces. Mallory asked what line of study had been taken up in these months. He told of the new books he himself had seen in shop windows in the city. The old man mended the sunken fire, taking some pieces of a pine box and an old hatchet from a closet in the chimney.

As he got up, Mallory's eyes rested on the books and papers on the table. One was a legal document, long and rather narrow in its fold. Idly his eyes spelt out, upside down, the writing on the back. Little chills ran down his back. His lips were dry.

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"The last will and testament of George Mallory Dent."

This was the will that disinherited him.

All sorts of wild fancies went through Mallory's brain. What if he should steal that will, and his cousin should die before he could make another? All the vast property would be his.

He reached out his hand to take it, and then he realized how inevitable detection would be, and how it would not only be public disgrace, for his cousin cared not a whit for the world, but it would cut off hope absolutely.

Mr. Dent was bending over his fire. The hatchet lay on the hearth. Mallory's heart went like a steam hammer. "No! no!" he was saying to himself; and even as he said it, almost in his grasp he saw that great fortune —life—the world. What was life or money to this old man?

Crying to himself that he would not, he put his hand out and drew the will towards him, his face purple with emotion.

He felt as though it were some demon that moved his arm—he had nothing to do with it. He snatched the hatchet, and struck again and again, in an agony of fear that he might not do the work thoroughly, that the old man would speak again and accuse him.

Then, keeping his eyes from the body, he opened the paper which he had still kept crushed in his hand.

The fire was there, and he intended to burn it, but some impulse—some caution—caused him to open it and see that it was the document which disinherited him, and which had moved him, forced him almost against his will, to kill his cousin.

It was very short.

After a few trifling bequests to old servants and friends, and a donation to the library of a well-known college, the entire property, consisting of stocks, bonds, mortgages and land, was bequeathed "to my cousin and only living relative, Mallory Arthur Dent."

Mallory turned again and stupidly looked at the date. "April the twentieth, eighteen hundred and ninety." That was two weeks after he had left the house. His cousin had either grown sorry for his hardness, or he had always intended to leave his property in this way.

Mallory's eyes went down to the huddled figure of the old man. He started once to pick the body up, and then he drew back.

Oh, the uselessness of it! The pity of it! An impulse of sorrow for the kind old man, dead, murdered by his own cousin, his almost adopted son, brought tears to Mallory's eyes, mingled, too, with sorrow for himself. Why hadn't he been wise enough to foresee this?

He put his arm on the mantelpiece and groaned in agony of spirit. He had put a terrible crime upon his soul, and for what? Worse than nothing!

And then he shut his teeth and called himself a fool and a coward.

He had an attack of terror when he saw that blood had stained the will.

"But any murderer might have handled it," he said to himself, putting it down on the table, while a great quaking took his heart at the name he had given himself.

He went over to the blinds and drew them down, walking round the dead man's feet, blew out the lamp, and walked out.

He hesitated at the door for an instant, the coming conversation with Grainger taking form in his mind. His heart was going like a whirling ball in his bosom. Suddenly he remembered that he had left no way for the supposable burglar to enter the house. He opened the library window and went back. He could find his way about the room in the firelight. He went over to the window and opened it. He stopped by his cousin's desk. There was money there, he knew. Mallory was not a thief. He stood and reasoned the matter out in his mind. There must be some seeming motive for the murder, and robbery was the only one.

He must take the money; and then it was only taking his own. Did not the will lying there leave him his cousin's possessions?

He turned the key of the shiny old mahogany desk and rumpled the papers. He knew the money-drawer, but he purposely fumbled on his way to it, disordering everything.

Finally he turned to go. The firelight flickered on the pitiful heap that half-an-hour before had been a clever, well-bred old man. Mallory shut the door softly. He felt as though he were somebody else. He felt himself arranging a programme of life for the person who was himself and yet a stranger.

He remembered that there was a theory that all murderers were insane He went over in his mind the possible plea of insanity if he were discovered.

Discovered!

There came an awful quiver as he thought of the consequences. He determined to buy a bottle of prussic acid and carry it about with him for an emergency.

He moved heavily out into the court, closed the door that led into the house and locked it. Grainger came out of his little kitchen, letting a light fall on the damp bricks.

"What luck, sir?"

Mallory had a stupid feeling that he had learnt a part and was forgetting it, but he improvised on the moment. He seemed to himself to be standing behind this new person he had become, and directing him.

"Grainger," he said, and there was almost a note of patronage in his voice—the consciousness of being no longer a beggar was coming out—"we have done my cousin an injustice. He brought out his will and showed it to me. He has never disinherited me. That idea was the anger of a moment. He has asked me to come back home."

"I can have your room ready in five minutes, sir. It's good news you tell me. I always knew Mr. Dent had a good heart."

"I am going to-night," Mallory said hastily. "I told some friends I would meet them in the morning. Be careful, Grainger, that you tell no one that I was here. I have been in France, you know."

"Yes sir—yes sir. No danger of my telling."

Mallory had walked out into the night. The ragged clouds were scuttling across the sky, and the wind blew fresh and damp across his face. As he went down the avenue, boldly stepping out, he still had that sensation of irresponsibility, of moving a creature who was dear to him, and in his care, but not himself. There was no fighting horror of his deed in him. He wondered that more murders were not committed, it seemed so simple a thing.

Mallory in these months had lived a life of which there could be no possible trace. He had gone to a poor and cheap little hotel in the East-end, and had lived upon the proceeds of his jewels and his wardrobe and some money he had had from Grainger. When he

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emerged into life again he came up with the old greetings, in the old way. He had felt that he had always expected to do this. He went to town that night, and getting into a cab, was driven to the hotel where he had kept a room for years before his departure from his former life. The clerk was the same, and the servants about the office. They all knew him.

"Give me my old room, if you can, Harris," he said graciously, as he wrote his name down. "I'm rather seedy. I've been out in a yacht for two weeks, and my baggage is goodness only knows where."

"Been hunting, sir?"

"Something like that. Glad to get back."

The clerk laughed. He had heard that story before.

Mallory went up to his room. He wrote some letters, one to his tailor, telling him he was in his hunting clothes, and he must send him up something respectable at once. He took a pleased comfort in his bath, and in daintily arraying himself in the clothing that was sent into him. His mind lingered on the trifles of half-a-dozen suits of silk underwear that came in. They looked so soft and luxurious.

It was afternoon before he was presentable. He knew he was not likely to hear of his cousin's death until the evening, and felt that the time until then was his own to be merry in, and he meant to make the most it. He came into the dining-room at one o'clock for his luncheon, fresh and modish, and at ease. The waiter, who had received plenty of cash from him in tips, drew out the chair at his favourite table at the avenue window, and beamed an anticipatory welcome.

As he crossed the room he heard his name pronounced in a tone that was flattering.

He turned hastily to see Emily Mason, with her mother and her young brother at the table he was passing.

How daintily pretty Emily was! He had never noticed before how the hair grew about her face. And what an innocent, sweet, oval face it was.

They greeted him with frank delight. They were so glad to see him home again, and had missed him very much. They had run in for a day for shopping and the matinée—wouldn't he go with them?

He would; and he would have luncheon with them. He listened, smiling and delighted, to all the light talk of their day, that had been, and would be again, his day. He had grown tired of the theatre in the old times, but as he thought of the bright, happy crowd, and of sitting in a box at Emily Mason's side, he felt that life was sweet.

He went to the train with them after the theatre was over, and gave Emily a lingering hand clasp that brought the colour into her cheeks.

"I'll be down in a day or two," he said gaily, as the train started.

He went leisurely back to his dinner, still smiling—opened the evening paper, and faced the head-lines of his cousin's terrible murder.

The story was told with all the ghastly details which belong to that class of literature.

A mention was made of the dead man's heir, who was on his way home from France, not knowing of the disaster; and then the last line said that there was strong circumstancial evidence against John Grainger, the servant of Mr. Dent. It was also evident that the murderer had entered by the door, as the window had been opened from the inside by blood-stained fingers.

Mallory took the train that night for Middleton, the little country town where his cousin lay dead. His anxiety to get to Grainger and hear what he meant to tell of his own visit, was the paramount idea. It meant a great deal more to him now, than seeing his cousin had meant last night.

Grainger must know. How could he face him?

How could he expect Grainger not to tell? If he but mentioned his coming last night, any child could read the true story of the murder. How clumsy he had been!

And oh, how unnecessary it had all been! He drew his finger about inside his collar as though he were strangling.

Certainly Grainger would tell of his coming. Did he expect him for an instant not to? He started up. He must get off the train, go somewhere, where there was yet time. Already he saw perpetually before his eyes that black horror.

And then he thought of Emily Mason, and what she would think when she knew that he was a murderer—that he killed his cousin, the man who had taken him, an orphan lad, and treated him as a son.

And within a few hours he had leant over her chair, had eaten at the same table with her, and been light-hearted, and happy and gay.

He would offer Grainger half his fortune. There were clever lawyers. They would not let an innocent man be convicted of a crime. There must be dozens of ways of getting out of it, and he would compensate Grainger, he should not suffer.

It was a bright sunny morning when Mallory reached the little town, which was in a state of great excitement over the murder. Mr. Dent had been a prominent citizen, and to have him killed one day, and his long-absent heir come home from France the next, was a sensation that gave an excuse for almost a cessation of the ordinary routine of the day.

Mallory was surrounded with old friends and acquaintances as soon as he left the train.

He wanted to push everybody away, to cry out and ask where Grainger was, that he might get to him, but he had to stop and receive condolences and make arrangements.

He emphatically declared to everyone his belief in Grainger's innocence, and as soon as possible made his way to the county gaol where he was confined. He found him sitting on the side of his bed, sad-faced and downcast.

Mallory fairly pushed himself ahead, he so dreaded the coming reproaches. Old Grainger loved him, but he knew that there was nothing that could stifle truth when it came to a matter between man and man. The old butler had a principle which never faltered.

Mallory felt himself cringe as he went in. Grainger sprang to his feet with a laugh of joy and relief. There were tears in his eyes, and his hands trembled greatly as he put them about Mallory.

"I knew you'd come, Mr. Mallory, just as soon as you heard. To think o' them thinkin' I'd harm Mr. Dent, that I've lived with all these years, that I've been taking care of like as if he'd been a baby!"

"Of course you didn't. Nobody believes you did, Grainger. The idiots who put you in here shall be made to pay for it. I'll have you out in a few hours."

"I can't think who could a' done it," Grainger said, his brow wrinkling. "Some tramp must have come along and seen his light and the open desk."

Mallory's heart beat with relief and nervous apprehension. It was so plain, yet evidently Grainger had not yet connected him with the crime. When would he begin to do so? The instant he began to put two and two together he would see.

"They asked me if there had been anybody there that

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evening," Grainger went on, "and I told them no. There wasn't anybody there but you, sir, and there wasn't any use of bringin' that in, and telling the family troubles we'd had and that nobody had known all this time."

Mallory found that it was not so easy a matter to release Grainger as he had supposed. Murder was not a bailable charge. His spirits rose again as he found that Grainger had not suspected him, and that there was no danger of his giving the clue to others. He felt almost as though he had not done the deed. He himself, this present personality, would never have been guilty of such a dreadful thing.

He went to his cousin's funeral, although he had not looked at the dead face, and felt sorry and unhappy in almost a normal way. The letters that came to him from old friends pleased him. He had been without sympathy all these months, and was inclined to value even the most perfunctory show of it.

The little note that Emily Mason sent he read over and over, and then put away in his pocket. He saw a great deal of her in the next few weeks. He rode and drove with her constantly. He did not stay at the old house, but had the whole interior torn out and remodelled. The room where his cousin had been killed he had torn entirely away.

The great lawyers that he had brought down to attend to Grainger's case all declared that there was no doubt of a complete acquittal. A man could not be convicted upon such flimsy evidence. And Mallory went on living his life, feeling that he was two selves, one the honest, upright man, generous, kind-hearted, whom Emily Mason knew and loved, and who was working and spending money to aid the old servant whose innocence he believed in, and the other that hidden self who sat sinister, yet ashamed, and prompted the other man in his part.

Sometimes he wondered if he would ever become possessed by a demon and confess. Men had done such things. And then one day he wondered if his children would inherit the tendency that had made him a murderer.

As the trial drew near he became hollow-eyed and nervous. Under all that questioning, something must come out, he felt that would show the world the true state of affairs. Let them but get the least clue, and the whole story was inevitable.

In his grief and despair one night, hungering for sympathy, and seeing it ready for him in her eyes, he had told Emily Mason that he loved her, and she had promised to marry him within a few weeks. He felt it another safe-guard against detection. He felt he was taking a hostage from fate. A kind Providence would not allow the happiness of a true, good woman like Emily Mason to be blasted.

Grainger, conscious of innocence, reassured by his lawyers, was cheerful and almost care-free. Mallory laid plans with him that he was to take charge of their house with a staff of servants of his own choosing, during his and Emily's long stay abroad after their marriage, which was to be celebrated in a fortnight or so. When they returned Grainger was still to have the chief place as director of household affairs.

Emily often came to see him, but never without Mallory. He told her that he did not care to have her go to the prison alone. He felt a horrible fear that she would discover the truth.

The trial opened with little excitement. Mallory attended the first day but as he was not called as witness, he did not go again. Everyone knew that he considered Grainger innocent, and it seemed likely to be only a short matter.

When he reached his room, after a long ride with Emily on the third day, he found the great lawyer sitting at the table.

"Mr. Dent," he said, "I've an astonishing piece of news for you. The jury without leaving their seats, brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree."

"What!" Mallory shouted, shaking the heavy man by the shoulder. "Convict an innocent man——"

"I know he is an innocent man," the lawyer said gravely. "As innocent a man as you are."

* * * *

Mallory had gone to the prison and said good-bye to Grainger, who had begged that the wedding should not be postponed. He would die happier, knowing that Mr. Mallory and Miss Emily were together.

The church was full of friends, as Emily walked down the aisle upon her father's arm to the sound of the wedding music.

The clergyman came forward in his white robes, as Mallory, ashy, shaking, took Emily's hand in his—in a double murderer's hand he thought.

As the clergyman began in his solemn voice, he wondered if it were he who would go from here to sustain Grainger to the gallows where he was going to die for him—Grainger, the kind old man, who had made his boyhood a happy one.

The service went on:

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it."

Mallory gave an awful cry, and throwing Emily's hand from him, turned and ran down the aisle like a madman.

People rose in their seats, and there were startled outcries, but he ran on, out of the door, hatless, the wind blowing his hair over his forehead, the white flower in his coat swinging on its stem as it slipped down.

On, on to the prison!

He must stop it, at any cost. What was he, that he should dare do this thing?

The people were gathered round the gaol. Mallory tore through the outer court, and was stopped by the guard at the door into the yard where the gallows stood.

"Let me by," Mallory shouted. "You know me. I must get out there."

"Stop! Stop!" he shouted, waving his arms wildly. "He didn't do it. I did it! I am the murderer!"

* * * * *

"Mr. Mallory, Mr. Mallory, for Heaven's sake, wake up! You must be dreamin' something terrible. Eat some supper."

Mallory opened his eyes and stared about the little kitchen. The kidneys were covered on the range.

He stared at Grainger, not hopeless and helpless and bound, but rosy and good-natured, pressing food upon him. He rubbed his eyes and laughed foolishly.

"I think I will have some supper before I go," he said.

An hour later, as he walked down the avenue, the cold rain in his face, he stopped again at his cousin's window, and saw him there, reading—reading, the green light on his bony old face.

He looked long, as though it were a precious sight, and then he thanked God, and went on.

M. Merriton.

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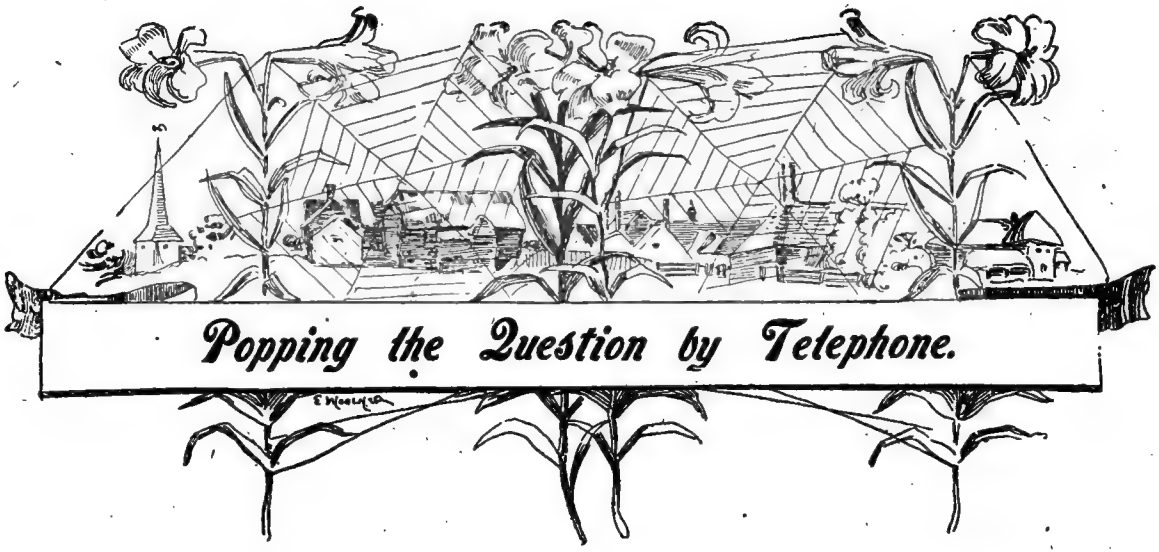

Popping the Question by Telephone.

I.

ARTHUR WINGFIELD was a very desirable young fellow from all points of view. He was in a City office; his salary was good for a youngster of twenty-four; his future prospects were bright; he enjoyed the confidence of his employers; and of five clerks he was the head. He handled the petty cash, and banked the firm's receipts. He drew out the quarterly balance-sheet of the firm, and therefore knew, as well as his employers, how matters of business stood.

Mr. Philpotts, the senior partner of Messrs. Philpotts and Leslie, merchants, Hannen Road, City, was getting on in years. His nearest living relative, Eric Philpotts, was a scapegrace nephew, an indolent, but good-looking youth of nineteen. He had been to Eton, and had had grounded in him what was in all respects a scholastic training, falling within short distance of a University education, but somehow, Eric, to use his own slang expression, "couldn't cotton to City work," and so by degrees he lost the confidence of his uncle, of the firm, until at length matters came to such a crisis that old Mr. Philpotts had perforce to dismiss him from the service of the office. Up to then he had been second clerk. But Eric was his uncle's heir, and not another living creature was there to rightly come between him and his uncle's vast wealth. But whatever Mr. Philpotts might do with the disposal of his own private property, either by leaving it to Eric, or to strangers, or to charities, it was clear that Eric's chance of succeeding to a position in the firm was now lost to him for ever.

Old Mr. Philpotts (he was known in the City as "Old Phil") was in an unusually merry mood one morning, and so after the early morning's business preliminaries were gone through and Wingfield had received instructions for the day, the head of the firm, standing with his back to the fireplace, put the question bluntly to Mr. Wingfield:

"Are you engaged to be married yet, Arthur?"

"Well, sir," stammered Arthur, "I cannot say that I am, although I am particularly friendly with a charming young lady."

"Why are you hesitating to pop the question? Are you afraid to marry on £250 a year?"

"Oh, no, sir; it isn't that at all," replied young Wingfield, colouring red in the face, for he was a bashful young man.

"Then, what is it?"

"I am afraid it is because I cannot summon up sufficient courage to ask her."

Mr. Philpotts smiled.

"I see—I see. It is only a question of time and opportunity," he said.

"I confess I have had both, but I have let them slip from me."

"Do you mean to say that she has fixed her affections elsewhere?" asked the chief with surprise.

"Oh, no! Alice Fortescue is not the kind of girl to throw me overboard. By that I mean to say that although we have often been together quite alone, I have somehow always felt a sort of repelling influence drawing me away from the main issue just when I have neared the crucial moment."

"What kind of girl is Miss Fortescue?"

"A dear, true-hearted, generous——"

"I don't mean by poetical inference," interrupted the chief, with a smile curling about his lips. "I can, of course, quite understand that you think her the brightest and best in the world. But who is she? What is she?"

"She is a stenographer at Luddigates and Simmons, Old Broad Street. We both live at Dalston and we come up to the City every morning——"

"And return at night, I suppose, and probably meet for lunch every day," added the chief, "and yet, like the point of a steel pen, you are extremely fine in your devotion, but divided on the question of coming up to the scratch. I sincerely sympathise with you, Arthur. But the only thing for you to do is to wait until Miss Fortescue proposes, which the young lady is bound to do, and pretty soon, too, I should imagine. I shall be glad when the happy day is fixed for many reasons. In the first place, every young man filling a position of trust ought to marry, for the fetters of wed-

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lock put restraint upon him. Again, certain changes have taken place in the office, in consequence of which more responsibility has been thrown upon your shoulders."

Thus expiating on the necessity of marriage, regarding it in every light as the chastening influence in the character of men, Mr. Philpotts walked up and down the room. He stopped suddenly.

"I am anxious to see you settled, Arthur. Mr. Leslie is thinking of retiring. I cannot last out much longer; that is to say, I, too should like soon to retire, hence Mr. Leslie and I are discussing the question of admitting you into partnership next year."

Mr. Wingfield was, of course, fairly and rightly staggered at this piece of good news.

His presence just then being required in the outer office, he withdrew from Mr. Philpott's private sanctum.

"I'll settle this business myself," thought the old gentleman. "I'll get Luddigates to lunch with me, and make arrangements—or I should say scheme them—for the early union of Miss Fortescue and Arthur. He is madly in love with her," saying which he walked over to the telephone and rung up No 1898, Bank.

"Are you there? Are you Luddigates and Simmons? Thank you. Who are you? Miss Fortescue, did you say? Ah, yes. Beautiful day, isn't it? Been away for your holidays, haven't you? Er—well—er—is Mr. Luddigates in? Ask him to come to the telephone, please, will you? I say, Luddigates, is that you? I'm Philpotts. Lunch with me to-day—usual place—want to see you particularly. Don't bother about him; it'll do to-morrow. Send him a wire, or telephone him, that you can't come. But you must come, my friend; something important. Thanks—yes—thanks. I'll be there at 1.30. Good-bye."

II.

Mr. Luddigates was sitting alone in his private office—a white-haired gentleman, with a fresh complexion and a kindly blue eye. He rang his bell, and presently here glided into his office, from an outer one, with book and pencil in her hand, a fair-haired girl of about twenty. Her face was perhaps pale, but she had a nice complexion, the beauty of which was added to by a pair of sparkling dark blue eyes. She was an extremely comely girl, of very persuasive manners, and was considered an unusually attractive young lady.

"I want to give you a few letters, Miss Fortescue." The girl sat down in her usual place close to Mr. Luddigates' desk, and "took down" about a dozen letters.

"Just one more, miss. Messrs. Philpotts and Leslie——"

The girl looked up blushing scarlet, and then bent her head down again.

"'My dear Philpotts,'" began Mr. Luddigates, "'I am grieved to hear of your determination not to stand for election for your ward, but if, as you tell me in your letter, the only reason is your age and the lack of supreme energy which accompanies one's every advancing year, perhaps there is ground for your supporters excusing you. I hear that our mutual friend, Leslie, is retiring. But I suppose you have still young Mr. Wingfield, a very promising young fellow, but as he remains unmarried, I should hesitate about doing that which you contemplate, at all events for the present. You tell me he is to be married soon. That's much better. As you have chatted with his young lady, you will, of course, know what she is like. Owing to the coming changes in the composition of the firm I can understand your anxiety respecting the solid position of your head clerk. Dine with me on Monday evening at my club, if you care to!'"

Miss Fortescue felt quite ill as she retired to her own desk in the outer office Her eyes almost danced out of her head. Everything about her was a blank. Her head swam; she was dizzy, hysterical. She hurried to the telephone box, which was in a third office, shut herself up in it, and rang up the Exchange furiously.

"Put me on 17,310 Bank," she called to the Exchange, with a pronounced tremor in her voice.

"Is that you, Arthur?"

"Yes—is that Alice?"

"Yes. Oh, Arthur, is it true—tell me, quick?"

"Is what true, darling? What's the matter?"

"Why—there's something wrong somewhere, isn't there?"

"There was a false alarm of fire here an hour ago. Don't be alarmed, dearest. I'm quite safe. The engines have gone."

"Oh, I don't mean that—but fancy your having a fire! How dreadful! I've rung you up about something else."

"Can't you go to-night? Don't bother, then, darling. I can get the tickets changed."

"You don't understand, Arthur. Mr. L. has just dictated a letter to your Mr. Philpotts, and your name is mentioned in it, and my heart is breaking."

"What does the old rascal say?"

"Why, that you're engaged to be married—but you are not, are you, dearest? Say no."

"I cannot say no. Are you there? Alice, are you there? Don't go away. I cannot say no. Am I not engaged to you?"

"To me, Arthur?"

"Of course, dearest. Isn't that so? But when is the day to be, Alice?"

"Oh! Arthur."

"Are you there? When is the day to be?"

"I'm taking my holidays next month—August 15th—but, Arthur, this is too——"

"I have just fixed mine with the governor for August 15th, too. How lucky! Shall we say then, my love?"

"Have you finished?" called out the Exchange operator.

They had.

Mulvy Ouseley.

Ethel: "Why did you dismiss Mr. Goodheart?"

Blanche: "Oh, he got so he'd rather sit at home and hold my hand than take me to the theatre."

"Your father doesn't know anything about artillery, does he?" he asked, *apropos* of nothing in particular.

"Not exactly," she replied, looking at the clock, "but on occasions I've known his boot to make a first-class substitute for a quick-firing gun."

However, he didn't wait to test it.

Miss Ethel: "Mr. Bloomer called upon you night before last."

Miss Clara: "Yes; he is delightful. But he stayed so late."

Miss Ethel (with a slight cough): "Yes, he told me that it was twelve o'clock before he could get away."

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ACCUSED BY A CLOCK.

It was magnificent, in its carved walnut-wood case, with its large enamelled dial, and with its pendulum of brass, bright as gold, passing and re-passing before the opening covered with a disc of glass. All who caught sight of it through Pierret's (the clockmaker's) window, stopped to gaze at it, and formed little knots about his door.

Pierret, the clockmaker, was still a man in his thirties; but nevertheless, he was inclined to sadness, and not at all talkative.

He had known a great sorrow.

Seven years before, while he was serving in the army, his father had been murdered—in this very shop now occupied by him.

Who was the assassin?

On whom could he avenge the old man, who had never done harm to anybody, and who had been so kind to him.

Justice had failed to lay hand upon the murderer and robber, who had carried off four thousand pounds, saved sou by sou by the father for his son.

All researches had been fruitless. Pierret had finished his time of service in the army, and, as soon as he was free, had returned and established himself in the murdered man's shop, determined, doubtless, to drive away care by labour.

But it was clear that sorrow was gnawing at his heart.

At nightfall he was seen wandering about the village as if in search of somebody, that somebody being, surely, the criminal.

Time passed—weeks, months, years. The murder was forgotten by all save the orphan and the—other, who could not but remember it.

Quite recently Pierret had gone to Paris and remained there several days making purchases, bringing back with him the magnificent clock, which set everybody who saw it longing to possess it.

"Come in, gentlemen," said Pierret to the admiring groups who pressed closely about his shop window.

"What is the price of it?"

"One hundred crowns."

"Does it strike?"

"Certainly. Listen!"

The clockmaker caused the bell to sound—clear, sonorous, silvery.

"But nobody will buy it," said Pierret. "I am afraid I have done a foolish thing in bringing it from Paris."

"Oh, that depends, Pierret! We are not rich enough, but there is somebody here——"

"Really! whom?"

"Eh? Locard, good-looking Locard! who is going to marry, and who doesn't mind what he spends."

"If you would not mind putting in a word for me——"

"With pleasure; and—who knows?—by touching him on the side of his vanity——"

"You would be doing me a great service."

Jacques Locard was not very much liked, and that for several reasons. In the first place he had made his fortune too suddenly. It had come to him from the clouds, by the intermediary of a notary—oh! not of this village, but of a long way off, over the mountains—an inheritance which had at once put him at his ease, and, he had increased this by dabbling in business.

For all that, he was close-fisted, spoke in a loud voice swaggered in the street, drank heavily, and had a following. When anybody wanted to unloosen his purse strings for a bowl of punch or a bottle of champagne, they knew on which side to deal with him. A man like him!—the king of the country! He wagged his head, and allowed himself to be taken in.

The thing, however, was not so easy as it had at first seemed to be. When the name of Pierret was pronounced before Locard, it evidently produced an unpleasant effect on that person's nerves. He disliked Pierret, that was clear. Well, everybody is free to like or dislike, according to his impressions, is he not Pierret, a pettifogger, an idler! No, no! he was not that; but even if he were, what had that to do with the greatest wonder that had ever been seen in the place? Besides, it cost nothing to look at it.

While talking, Locard had drunk a good deal. He began to get warm, saying "Yes," saying "No," and

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finally consenting to stroll as far as the clockmaker's shop, then withdrawing his consent.

"Why, anyone would say you are afraid to go to Pierret's——"

"Afraid? I? What do I care for Pierret? Come on."

The little watchmaker was at his bench, his magnifying glass in his right eye, bending over the works of a watch. Certainly he was not looking at anything that was going on outside his shop, yet he saw, very plainly observed, the approaching group, and something very much like a smile might have been seen to play about his lips as he did so. He hoped for a customer, and to a poor tradesman that must always be a pleasant feeling, must it not? Oh, doubtless. But of all possible customers Pierret hoped for one; and that one was now at the door.

Locard entered.

"Is that it?" he said contemptuously.

Pierret rose politely. Locard turned his back upon him—from hauteur evidently. In short he immediately agreed to give the twelve pounds, and threw down a five pound note on account, on condition that the clock should be that same evening installed in his dining-room at his house.

Who did not know Locard's house? In less than an hour the clock should be there.

"This evening, friends," cried Locard (of course he did not include Pierret), "we'll drink to my new piece of furniture!"

"At what hour?"

"Nine o'clock."

As soon as Pierret found himself quite alone, he burnt the bank-note in the flame of a candle. Then he went into the room behind the shop, and took up a small box, on which there were English labels pasted. Returning, he opened the case of the clock—no doubt to regulate the movement.

Within the promised time it was placed—prominently placed—amid the rich furniture of Locard's dining-room.

Round the table—from which, point upwards, a goodly array of bottles stand—Locard and his old friends drink, laugh, and sing. Eleven o'clock—the silver bell records the hour. What a voice—a song rather! One could listen to it through the whole night. Midnight—the voice puts forth all its delightful power.

Attention! One! two! Light the punch! The flame flits, obl n-like, over the surface of the bowl lapping it with upthrown tongues of yellow and blue. The sugar frizzles. Now put out the lamp. Huzzah! Hush! the clock is going to strike.

No, it speaks.

"Jacques Locard! Jacques Locard!"

"Eh? Who spoke? Who said that?"

"Jacques Locard! Confess! confess!"

"Locard! Locard! What jest is this? How very pale you are!"

The voice sounds as if it came from the cellar.

"Jacques Locard, you are a murderer!"

"It is false! Who has dared to say that?"

"Jacques Locard, it is you who killed old Pierret! Assassin!"

There were cries, groans. Locard had risen to his feet—lost, mad! He clutches at his cravat to tear it from his strangled throat. The voice still pitilessly continues—veiled, distant, as if coming from a tomb. It repeats, repeats, repeats the word "assassin!"

Locard falls upon his knees, rises, falls again.

"I confess! I confess!" he cries. "Yes, it was I who killed the old man and robbed him; but let that horrible voice cease."

It did not stop, but went on repeating its dreadful denunciations with the persistency of a machine in motion.

"It is the clock that speaks!" screamed Locard, seizing it, shaking it, dragging it from its place, casting it upon the floor. The works were scattered, and in their midst was seen a small cylinder covered with metallic paper.

Pierret, who had heard all, sprang into the room through the open window, and seized Locard by the throat.

"You are all witnesses that this man is the murderer of my father!" he cried.

* * * * *

Murder will out; but men who take the lives of their fellow men for gain always think their cunning more than a match for proverbial wisdom. So thought Locard and had not seven years' impunity justified his estimate of his own cleverness? No; it had only put him off the guard which the murderer must never for a moment cease to keep. The police had utterly failed to track him down—had not even associated him in any way with the crime! yet there had been a detective at his heels, as he now saw with horror.

A few years in the army do one of two things—sharpen or deaden the wits of a soldier; they sharpened Pierret's. The failure of the police left in his mind a deep and bitter sense of disappointment. His father had been cruelly murdered and robbed, almost in the light of day—a kindly but undemonstrative man respected by all his old townsmen; who was never known to have made an enemy; who had many friends, Locard among the number. Who but one of his friends could have known that he had, by the merest accident of circumstances, the whole savings of his life in his possession that day, in view of an advantageous investment to be completed on the morrow that never came for him? No stranger could have known of this.

No stranger? That idea haunted Pierret's mind day and night and goaded him to action. Step by step he pushed on inquiry. Bit by bit he came upon the history of all his father's old friends and associates; and at length suspicion pointed to the sudden and vaguely explained uprising of Locard, nearly simultaneous with the old clockmaker's assassination. There was the murderer's false reckoning of chances; too eager for the enjoyment of his murder-stamped gold, he surprised his acquaintances by his ostentatious display of means; but Pierret he provoked to make inquiry as to their origin.

Still the proof, the legal proof, eluded the young man's search, though he had come close enough to it to satisfy the instinct of his heart; while the persistency which Locard, who had been an almost daily visitor at his father's house, avoided him was in itself a confession. It was at this stage of his search for justice that the idea of laying a trap for the criminal came into his mind.

* * * * *

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the prosecuting barrister, "you see here of what social utility is the progress of science. Was it not a trait of genius on the part of a poor clockmaker to have utilised, by adapting it to the mechanism of an ordinary clock, that immortal invention of Edison's, the phonograph?"

G. G.

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A BITTER REVENGE.

PERADVENTURE I was wrong. Wiser men than I have gone astray over a subject far less intricate than a woman. Maybe it was a pang of jealousy that shot through my already wavering heart and turned the admiration I had hitherto held for her into curiosity not unmixed with hatred. And that jealousy was not without good and sufficient basis.

From the time that she joined our company, Ira Cleon was the idol of both men and women. All the men worshipped her, and all the women admired her.

I say all the men, but it was not so. There was one who prided himself on his ability to read the woman off on sight; who discovered, or imagined he discovered, traits in her character that were hidden from the rude gaze of the world; who more than once by the careful wielding of the power he possessed, succeeded in bringing forcibly before the unhappy woman her inmost thoughts and wishes, laying them bare in the air which surrounded her. I was that person.

Ira Cleon appeared amongst us when *The Feud* was about to be produced for the first time at Norman's Theatre. She came as leading lady. Our manager had picked her up in America, but she was not an American. She spoke several languages, but no one knew her history.

She was very beautiful, and I cannot do justice to a description of her. Yet with my blunt pen and dull wit I will make the attempt.

Her eyes were large, blue, and overhung with long silky lashes; her soft cheeks were tinged with the rosiest red; the full, rich lips, the pearly teeth, the short, curly hair, the white dimpled arms, the form of suppleness and grace—combine the whole with a strange union of masculine force and womanly sweetness, and you may be able to catch a glimpse of our lady through the misty and all too clumsy veil of prosaicness that I in my capacity have drawn round her beauty.

Thus, in such a form she is as near perfection as mortal woman could hope to be.

But, listen to her conversation, watch her stride, note the vile cigarette between those dainty lips, and hear in amazement the coarse jests that emanate from the small clouds of smoke that rise about her curly head.

Then you will, perhaps, get an insight into the character of this fair lady.

She rises from the box on which she has been sitting—carelessly, legs crossed—and strides over to the manager anxiously scanning a roll of manuscript. She claps him on the back with a loud "Ha! Ha!" that makes him start. It amuses her, but the oath that is on his lips is dispelled in a moment, for he knows full well she can give him back all that he is worth.

Again, she passes on to an actor, a pale-faced, black long-locked youth, madly in love with her, whose obsequious courtesies she repudiates with scorn. Sometimes, however, she smilingly encourages him, raising his hopes to ecstatic bliss, then, out of mere wantonness and pleasure at seeing him suffer, dashes him down to grovel at her feet, by an expression of displeasure, or the shadow of a frown.

She is in a playful mood to-night, and the sickly boy rejoices at her winning smiles, hoping against hope they are meant for him, and him alone.

"Ah, poor Turmole! she cried, nonchalantly, flinging aside the stump of her cigarette, and preparing a fresh weed. "You seem in good spirits to-night. Not quite so confoundedly groggy." And she laughs gaily as the gas jet, at which she obtains a light, radiates on the cruel, lovely face.

"'Tis but natural," comes the reply, with a dramatic flourish of the thin, white hand, "that I should feel the glamour of your presence, even as the world looks bright and cheerful beneath the warm and fruitful rays of King Sol."

"Then it's comforting to know I have a different effect upon you to what the moon has," she replies, with a slight dash of sarcasm, moving towards her next victim.

"Oh, pray, you misunderstand me," gasped the love-sick one, stretching out his hand supplicatingly after her in vain. He sinks back dejected, miserable, realising in its intensity the bitter fact that this woman he adores despises him.

And so she passes from one to another, treating them in much the same way, knowing all the time what pain and anguish she is causing the love-sick fools, and revelling in her heartlessness.

All the women admired her, too, even showing their appreciation of her talent by going so far as to beg a photograph of her in the costume of Prince Arthur.

She loved her profession; her whole heart was on the boards. She may have been good at the bottom; sometimes I almost fancy she was, and that I was too harsh in criticising her little excesses. More than once she told me I had no right to do so as a fellow actor.

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"Let society be my judge," were her words; and society went mad over her, though beyond its kindly criticisms she cared nothing for society.

She always assumed male *rôles*, and few were able to bring out so fully and powerfully the features that characterise the stage hero.

There came a time, some months after she appeared amongst us, when the piece which had met with a most successful run, was to be supplanted by another of an equally thrilling nature, the cast of which meant the addition of another member to the company.

This person took the form of a man named Ralph Masser, a tall, splendidly-built fellow, with a forcible and determined cast of countenance.

I shall never forget the night of the first rehearsal. How we all watched every movement of that lithe and muscular body, listened to the sound of that rich, deep voice, and applauded with genuine admiration as he stepped to the back of the stage at the conclusion.

I was near Ira as he finished, and she just clasped her hands in rapture, while a soft bravo! escaped her lips. Somehow or other I could not keep my eyes off her face, and I noticed that as she caught sight of him when he turned towards us, a deathly pallor overspread the features, while a gasp of amazement and terror issued from the white lips. No one else saw the little incident. It was soon over. But I am an observant man, and my suspicions were aroused. She must have known him before.

On one occasion I told her so. But she strenuously denied it. Then I became so positive that she admitted the truth of my assertion.

It so happened that Ira and the newcomer shared the honours of the celebrated duel scene in the new play. And she never acted so well as when with him, treating him with marked familiarity.

I watched them narrowly. No one else did; no one else had any reason for doing so. I had. True, every male actor in our company was madly jealous, but, after a time, resigned himself to fate, and gave up all hope of ever winning the love so palpably offered to another.

If tender actions may be taken as a sign of tender feelings in these matters, little doubt could be entertained as to whether or not the two loved.

He was ever by her side, whispering soft words to her willing ears, driving her to and from the theatre, championing her cause during her absence. She, too, laughed less often when he was near, never gave way to coarse jokes, accepted the little favours from him that she refused from others, and flushed slightly at his approach. These signs all came under my notice, and I had many opportunities of observing them.

Still, there seemed to me to be an occult something existing between them which it was impossible to unravel. They had reached a point in their love beyond which it appeared impossible to extend.

Once, at a morning rehearsal, I chanced to stumble unobserved into the green-room. There they sat, together, on a loung , her head resting on his shoulder. She was speaking, and as I turned to go, the words—

"My love, my only love!" fell upon my startled ears.

Then, as the days went by, her smile came less often, and the eyes became encircled with dark rings, her step was less sprightly than of old, while sometimes she became dazed and bewildered, losing all control of her movements and the thread of her discourse. The manager saw and noted all these developments for the worse in her disposition, and said that she studied too hard. No one could in common fairness gainsay that. She had worked hard ever since we had known her, and certainly a change would do her good. Rather than lose permanently so valuable a member of his company, he decided to finish up the run and send her off to America for a time with Masser. To this both agreed.

On the last night I was standing in the wings, awaiting my cue, when I heard them approaching. She was staggering slightly, with pale face and quivering body. He was supporting her. Some strange incident had taken place between them, of that I felt certain. When they got quite close to me she was better, though very white.

Ira went on first, and I had never seen her look more beautiful. The house fairly shook with rolls of applause, which burst out afresh as he entered from the opposite side.

With a small peaked cap set jauntily on the mass of golden curls, a light blue cloak hanging caressingly over her shoulders, and her shapely limbs encased in a pair of white breeches and top boots, our leading lady represented to perfection a champion of the age of chivalry.

By her side hung a small sword—a mere plaything—bright, glistening, and harmless. This she drew at the conclusion of a blusteringly delivered speech, and swung round her head, crying to the ruffian who stood before her:

"Defend yourself!"

With a well-practised, swift movement, his rapier leapt from its sheath, and steel clashed to steel.

How the people applauded! They were splendidly matched, these two, his six feet scarcely lifting him above her plume-covered cap.

At last, as in all such battles, the hero, by a dexterous movement sent his opponent's sword springing across the greensward.

"Enough," she cried, holding her weapon aloft, then flinging it away with a gesture of contempt.

She approached him, and, as a hundred times before she had done, would have clasped his hand. But at that point she hesitated. A thrill seemed to pass over the delicate frame. The whole theatre was hushed in silence. A white hand was ungloved and thrust beneath the light-blue cloak. Another second, and Masser lay unconscious on the stage, while a thin blue ring of smoke curled unnoticed up and up till it vanished in air.

* * * * *

Masser was not mortally wounded; he recovered from the effects of his wound, and left the country before Ira came back to health and strength.

It was all explained a few months afterwards.

She was a Corsican, and had sworn to avenge her brother's death. Such was the issue of the battle between love and duty.

Masser had known her motive all the time; had known that she would attempt his life, sooner or later. And the strangest part of the whole thing was his connivance at it.

FRANK SYDENHAM.

A NUMBER of children were making a good deal of noise, and their mother, after rebuking them several times, at last said: "If I have to speak to you again I shall punish some of you."

At this the younger child rolled off the sofa, and, after gravely reflecting awhile, remarked: "Then, mamma, I'd advise you not to speak."

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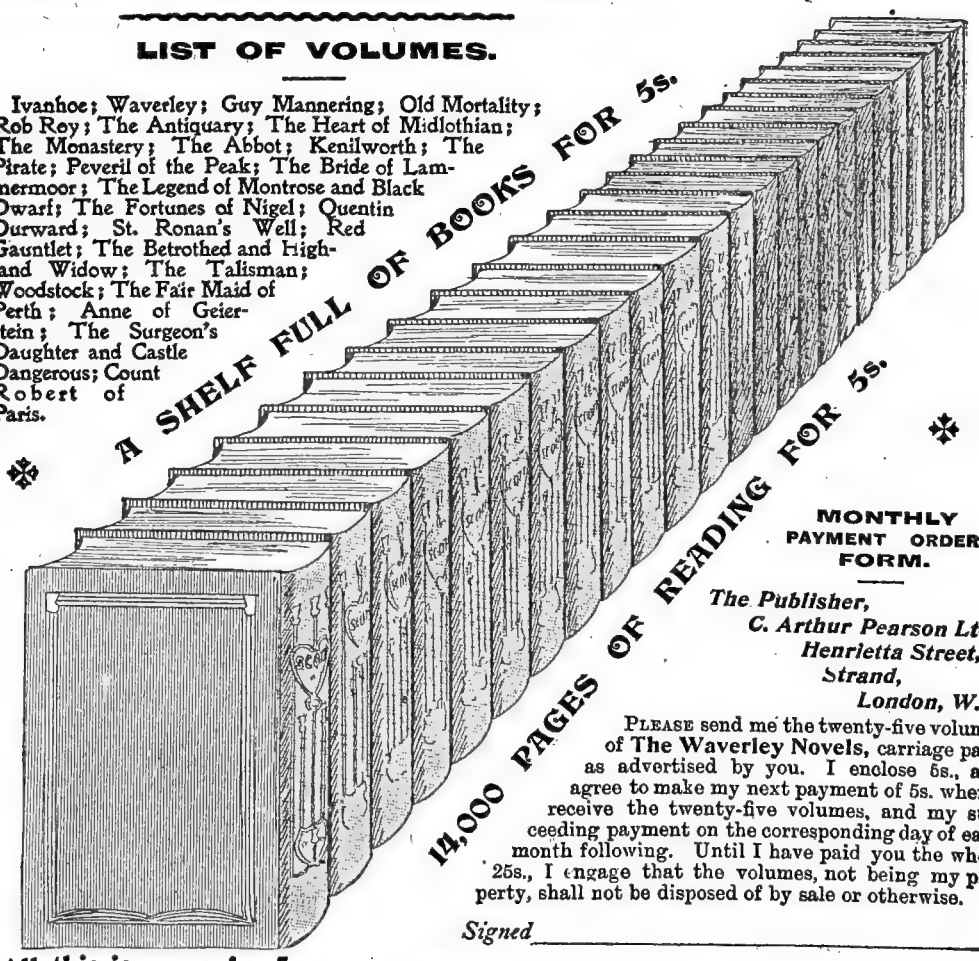

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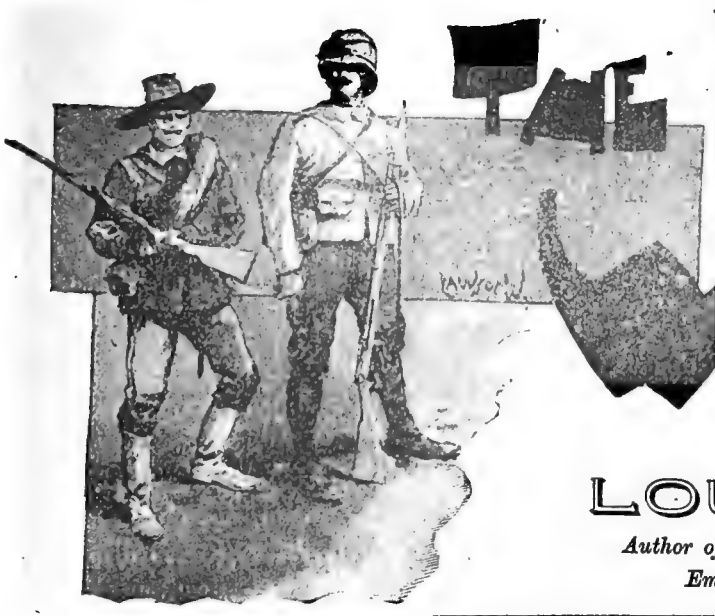

THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

England and the United States.

When Parliament met on the evening after the battle of Cardiff, it wore an aspect of serener dignity than its wont.

This was the only external sign of the elation born of the new turn in events.

The period of excitement had long passed away, and the popular Chamber no more had its moods. Representing truly the genius of the English people, the splendid calm of the House of Commons amid all the varying fortunes of the war, its phlegmatic pride, its stern attitude of quiet resolution, formed a striking example of the indomitable character of the Saxon people.

As day after day passed, each with its new and startling development, its record of heroism, its swift dramatic action, the House sat outwardly unmoved, betraying no emotion, grimly imperturbable.

To many who waited breathless in the galleries and witnessed the solemn scenes in which the great assembly received the daily reports of the Under-Secretary for War and, with scarce a word of discussion, rapidly passed measures of supreme importance and far-reaching consequences, it seemed as if history had unrolled itself, and a return to a period of national danger had produced anew an heroic type.

For the members of the House of Commons, faced by dangers so grave, made one by the overshadowing menace of ruin, had revived in themselves those stern Puritan virtues which have left so deep an impression on the character of England.

A meeting of the House was curiously like a meeting of that Long Parliament which sat through the Civil War.

There was the same inexorable purpose, the same equanimity, the same high moral temperament, the same majestic gravity—scarcely a ripple of emotion, scarcely a word of debate, scarcely a hint of disagreement—the House was in the truest sense a single and united body.

Even to the casual eye this fact became obvious. In the appearance of the Commons there was something novel that would have staggered a Rip Van Winkle of a month.

The Conservative party greatly outnumbered the Liberal, and the accommodation to the right of the Speaker was consequently very inadequate. Etiquette gave comfort to the Liberals and discomfort to the Conservatives. By tactic consent the term Unionist was dropped, as being no longer distinctive.

But a week or so before the great battle of Cardiff, Sir E. Ashmead Bartlett, coming into the Chamber whilst the First Lord of the Treasury was making an important statement, and seeing that there was not an unoccupied place upon his own side of the House, calmly walked across the floor to the thinner ranks of the Liberal party, and in a nonchalant manner took his seat upon the right of Mr. Haldane.

The incident—despite even the gravity of the moment—produced a little laughter and some applause. But the ultimate effect produced was extraordinary. It was felt that Sir Ellis's act had in it a touch of genius. Of what use etiquette of party when no party existed, or discomfort to the right when there was ease to the left?

Took his seat upon the right of Mr. Haldane.

And from that day, indifferent to points of custom, the members of the House proceeded to take their seats exactly where they found them. Liberal and Tory, Whig and Radical, Ulsterman and Nationalist were to be seen side by side as chance would have it, and for the first time in centuries the House of Commons presented externally no aspect of division or party.

Mr. John Burns was seen to slap General Goldsworthy on the back, whilst next to him Mr. T. P. O'Connor chatted amicably with Mr. Austen Chamberlain. A friendship which evoked much comment was that which suddenly sprang up between Tim Healy and the Serjeant-at-Arms.

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"The whole Saxon race is against the rest of the world."

When Parliament met on the day succeeding the battle of Cardiff, there was no change in its attitude of dignified decorum. There was only a more crowded meeting and a subdued air of expectancy and unrest.

Amid deep silence, Mr. Balfour read to the house a communication received from the President of the United States, announcing the American declaration of war against the allies.

"This step," declared the message, "is taken with a full sense of the responsibility it involves. The American people have maintained their attitude of neutrality so long as hostilities appeared to be those of nation with nation. The intervention of Russia, however, transforms the war into a European conspiracy, in which the peace and prosperity of the whole world are involved. America regards it as a threat to the principles of liberty, and in so holy a cause she cannot hesitate. She will put forth her whole strength of wealth and courage, to assist England, and her armies, for the first time in history, are prepared to take the field—if not by choice in France, where old ties make such a step distasteful—at least in Germany, Russia, or any other country where joint deliberation may determine. The American people extend the hand of kinship and affection to the British nation, and are proud that the traditions of the great Saxon race are now to be defended and maintained by the peoples on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean."

It was in slow and impressive tones that Mr. Balfour read this telegram, and, as he concluded, he looked round upon the House and paused.

And then, in an instant, nobody knew how prompted or suggested, the whole House rose to its feet and uncovered. It was an act of welcome and gratitude to a new ally: an act more impressive than the most clamourous and turbulent demonstration.

Mr. Balfour then proceeded with his speech. He uttered an eloquent tribute to the generosity of the American people, and, in the name of Great Britain and Ireland, offered the thanks of the United Kingdom.

"There is no need, sir," he went on, turning to the Speaker, "to use extravagance of language, even at a supreme moment such as this, when our feelings are likely to over-balance our judgment. Let us look at this offer calmly and see what it means.

"Am I belittling it when I claim that it has not come at a moment of desperate need? The English armies are sore pressed, but they are unbeaten; they have swept their way into hostile countries and have not yielded a jot in the great scheme of invasion. Our fleets on all sides have vindicated the invincibility of England upon the seas. And it is my profound belief that, under the guidance and protection of Heaven, the British people would have forced their way to ultimate victory, alone and unaided though it be, against the three most powerful nations of Europe.

"Am I wrong in thus emphasising the proud belief in the destinies of Great Britain with which the humblest of her sons is animated—a belief in the eternal security of a nation which has, so far as human weakness permitted, based its acts upon the most sacred principles the world has known, the principles of liberty and of righteousness?"

There was applause at these words. Mr. Balfour continued:

"But the victory, let us confess, would be long delayed, lying, perhaps, far off in a dim and melancholy day, the passage to which would be filled with the groans of suffering, the lamentations of bereavement, the piteous cries of the fatherless and the widow; and stained, too, with misery, ruin, destruction, nay, even with famine and despair. This frightful passage we had entered upon without hesitation or misgiving, but let us be thankful that it is rendered shorter, lighter, easier to traverse, by the help and manly courage of another great people, the people who are of our own blood and lineage, who share our history, whose language is our own.

"Yes, sir, it is an alliance of which there should have been, could have been, no doubt whatever. It was ordered in Heaven. Nature herself called aloud for it; and if there interposed the mere chicanery of man, the interests of individuals, the narrow, selfish policy of ambition or of party, how futile and how powerless they have proved against the mighty and irresistible instinct of race, of family, of mutual blood! For America herself has risen in her strength and shaken off at a shrug the feeble manacles by which they sought to bind her; and over the ocean peals the great voice of our brethren, bearing a message of sympathy and help.

"Sir, is it unnatural? And am I right when I say that there could be no other issue of the desperate alliances amongst our foes?

"No; this is no mere struggle between one nation and another. As the American President has rightly said, there are deeper causes at work, there are principles fighting with each other, and in this stupendous contest seeking each the extermination of the other.

"This war means that the forces that have worked for selfishness, for aggrandisement, for slavery, for personal greed, are pitted against the forces that work for liberty, for progress, for peace. It is an old world fighting with a new; it is feudalism taking its last stand against democracy.

"Is the world to be the battleground of ambitious nations and cruel tyrannies; or is it to become a universal garden, smiling with peace, and ruled by temperate and beneficent wisdom?

Miss Lottie Collins .... appearing in the uniform of the Guards.

"That is the tremendous problem which this war is to solve. And solved it must be. It is a war of extermination; it is, in truth, the Final War.

"And, if this be so, how else can we regard it, save that if Europe attacks freedom and democracy, she attacks the peoples who support and maintain these principles, in a word, Britain and America, the entire Saxon race? The quarrel that Europe has with England she also has with the United States. America is our heir. If we passed away as an Empire in the death-throes of the fight, the splendid heritage that we have secured would descend in sacred trust to the United States, and it would henceforth be her mission to cherish, to guard, to protect it. That is why, surely, we had a right to expect the support of our brethren. The battle is once more between the West and the East; the whole Saxon race is against the rest of the world.

"It is our duty, then, the duty of the Briton, whether on this side or on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, to rally to the common cry, to overthrow the forces of evil

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arrayed against us, to demonstrate by might—as we are alas! compelled—our controlling power upon earth, and then with wisdom and benevolence to mete out the conditions of a new era, the golden era of peace, freedom and prosperity.

"One word more, sir. Let us not be too jubilant. The way is long yet, and dark and heavy with catastrophe. We are few against many. We strive with odds that threaten by sheer bulk to overawe and overwhelm us. America is rich in war and in resources, but her army is not yet formed.

"She has once more to create a splendid militia, such as that which, in the last war, won the admiration of the world. Let us, then, remember that a bitter struggle is still before us, that many a long day of sacrifice remains, and that there is need now as ever of the strong, patient heart of Great Britain to continue in endurance and in magnanimity."

Loud cheers greeted the conclusion of Mr. Balfour's great speech.

A few words of similar import were uttered by Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Dillon, and then a solemn and stately message of thanks to the people of America was framed and adopted.

If gravity and decorum prevailed in the House there was at least excitement without. Not the turbulent excitement that a sudden sensation causes, but a strong and passionate impulse of national pride.

This great people had been prepared to fight on and on single-handed, not in braggadocio or idle vaunting, but with the calm resolution of their self-contained nature. The sudden news that a kindred people had come forward to take their share of the struggle had filled the English nation with emotion, a grave, sober emotion, such as one man in deadly peril feels when another comes swift and silent to his aid.

Joy reigned on every face. For instinct was truer than argument, and every Englishman realised how absurd were the artificial barriers that sought to separate the two members of a great race.

England and America were not cousins, they were brothers. It was impossible that England should stand idly by and see America worsted. It was impossible that America should see England at bay before the world and be mute.

It was no alliance this. It was the reunion of one great family.

No less did the Americans in London feel the thrill of this new emotion. There were a thousand touching scenes in which the bond of union was manifested, as though it were the meeting of brothers after a long separation.

Fashionable London was present that night at Covent Garden Opera House. There had been no break in the continuity of pleasure. The imperturbable Englishman ordered his life as before, and although sorrow had closed many houses and there was ever present the sense of national calamity, still there was no such concession to the foe as would be implied in universal mourning.

The music-halls throve apace, and poets were busy on all hands in writing patriotic ballads which were set to music by inflamed composers. At the Tivoli Miss Marie Lloyd defied the allies every night at ten, and at the Palace Miss Lottie Collins created a sensation by appearing in the uniform of the Guards and singing a passionate song which told the world that:

When in their envy nations rise
And to each other call,
And coward-like in swift surprise
Upon Old England fall!
Roused in his wrath the Lion flies
And sweeps away them all.

Everywhere, on variety stage, in melodrama, from street band and hurdy-gurdy, pealed forth the strains of martial music, and life was made mournful to every earnest member of the Peace Society. Even Dan Leno linked his patter to patriotism, and no acrobat could leap from pole to pole without displaying upon his back the emphatic colours of the British ensign.

"Here, miss, a corpse reviver, please!"

On Friday night the management had announced *Parsifal* at Covent Garden. It was the first performance in England, for the copyright question had been settled and English prejudice no longer protested against a sacred work upon the decorous stage of the national Opera house. A huge and fashionable gathering had assembled, crowding every part, and the stage was filled with operatic stars of first magnitude.

It is to be feared that Wagner was little attended to that night. A constant buzz booming through the house plainly showed that the music of the future had less attractions than the politics of the present.

About ten o'clock it was observed that the curtains of the royal box were fluttering, and then, to the enthusiasm of all, the Prince and Princess of Wales appeared in the full view of the house.

The whole audience rose to their feet and cheered and cheered again, and the Prince, with smiles, bowed repeatedly, the Princess meantime standing at his side, her arm linked in his.

It was noticed, too, that the Prince's eyes were wandering over the boxes on the other side of the house as if in search of something, and then, as if satisfied, he withdrew abruptly and disappeared from view.

It was but for a few moments, however. What could express the delight and enthusiasm of the house when he was seen again in another box, bringing forward to the sight of all present no less a person than the American Ambassador.

There are some supreme moments when in mere vociferation the whole moral feeling of a people exhaust themselves. This was one. The two who stood there, the Prince and the simple American citizen, the heir to the proudest of thrones and the commoner of the greatest of democracies, were true symbols of the great event that had happened, the reunion of the old and the new England.

"Mr. Smith," said the Prince with a warmth that knew nothing of courtly ceremony, "your name is a fit one indeed for a representative of your country. We recognise her chivalry, and I thank you in the name of Britons throughout the world."

"Sir," answered the ambassador simply, "we are all Britons. America, I assure you, is prouder to-day when she shares your peril than when in the beginning she claimed her independence."

There was an opportunity for but few words, for the excitement in the House was not to be allayed. It was impossible to follow the tortuous passage of Wagnerian phrases through the entanglements of bewildering orchestration. Already the audience began to rise and move about, to gather its wraps, and to discuss with animation the dramatic scene they had witnessed.

The manager, with true tact, saw that the performance could not continue, and he ordered the curtain to fall. But a minute later it rose again. The entire company advanced to the front of the stage and sang, with a vigour and fulness which opera seldom knew, the National Anthem.

When the last strains died away there was a moment's pause, and then Madame Melba advancing started the

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American Anthem "Hail Columbia." The audience joined lustily in it, and the whole theatre rang with the simple refrain.

The audience flowed out to the buffets and there was an end to orderly speech. Everyone spoke to everyone else, and over a whisky and soda a reign of brotherhood began.

"I can't do much," said one of the crowd to his own circle of excited listners. "But blow me if I don't go in for American drinks. Here, miss, a corpse reviver, please!"

Never were the American bars so popular as through the next week or so. It was a tribute that the least might pay to a new ally!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The News the Spy Sent.

The people of England were now beginning to calm down to a grave appreciation of the dangers and difficulties of the war.

In the first wild days of public excitement, with their anger, their eagerness, their mad jubilation at the success of British arms, affairs had rushed forward in such a fierce and turbulent stream that a quiet survey of the situation was impossible and not to be expected.

But on the morning after the defeat of the Russian fleet by the United States force, the Times gave philosophical utterance to the national sentiment in its chief leading article.

"By the spontaneous action of our brothers across the Atlantic," said the great newspaper, "England and America now practically face the world in arms. The English-speaking race is called upon to fulfil its mission; to its hands are fully committed the future destinies of mankind. The duty to which we are devoted is noble yet awe-inspiring. We are no longer fighting a national quarrel, having become the trustees of human progress and civilisation.

"In this momentous struggle we represent the misgoverned and misled peoples of the Continent as completely as our own communities. When the stress and fury of combat shall have passed away our first consideration must be the claims of justice and tolerance and Christian charity. Let us pray for light and strength to guide and sustain us in our task."

These magnanimous words were directed by a kindly Providence.

By mysterious channels they found their way into France and Germany and far-off Russia. They planted fruitful seed in the hearts of the true patriots in those countries, and in due course they blossomed into a vigorous growth which largely dominated the arrangements for satisfactory and restful peace.

Puck exactly hit off the situation by its cartoon.

The Daily Chronicle, too, found cause in the situation to become contemplative. "Lest there be any misapprehension in the minds of sections of the English people regarding the attitude of the Liberal and Radical party," wrote the well-known organ of the Opposition, "it is our duty to finally and completely disavow all sympathy with what was once known as the Little England party.

"When our fleets are grappling with the navies of three powerful nations in all parts of the world, when our soldiers, in hundreds of thousands, are camped on the shores of Germany and France, when Australia is shaking off the wolves who would devour her, when our Indian army is tightening its accoutrements preparatory to invading Asiatic Russia, when the United States are impelled to cast in their lot with ours in the throes of this new epoch, it is no time to talk about Little England.

"The words in the past represented a policy, an honest endeavour to preserve the balance of power, a fair division of the yet unoccupied places of the earth's crust. To-day the mere jingle of the phrase is hurtful and ridiculous. We solemnly inter it. May it rest in peace."

Even Mr. Labouchere accepted the inevitable. "I can plainly see," growled Scrutator, "that the columns of Truth will be actively employed when this wretched business is finished in denouncing the grabbing and Maximising that will go on in Africa and Asia for a considerable time. Meanwhile it is not Grab but Holdfast that is a good dog, and I will bark with the loudest in this quarrel."

The Stock Exchange being closed, its members, such as were not actively engaged with the army, naturally had their little joke. They telegraphed to the chairman of the Wall Street Institution: "We welcome your fleet. Where are the excursion steamers?"

But the Americans got even with them. Soon the reply came: "Excursion steamers all engaged in protecting Cardiff."

The new policy of diplomatic openness, inaugurated by Mr. Chamberlain during the Transvaal crisis some years earlier, was now emulated by the United States Government with excellent effect.

Daily, almost hourly, messages were received at the American Embassy from State Departments at Washington, detailing the preparations for taking an active part in hostilities now being made all over the country; and these cheering items of news were immediately sent to the British Press.

Thus, one read: "Two army corps, of 100,000 men each, will be shipped from New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, in detachments of 20,000. They will each carry full complements of arms, horses, ammunition, and clothing, with large supplies of field stores, and may be expected to arrive

The coster was not a bad sort of fellow.

in England, or elsewhere as directed, between June 5th and 12th."

And again: "The first contributions of America's aid will consist of well-drilled troops, but a subsidiary army of 400,000 men is now being energetically mobilised. Volunteers are pouring into all the centres of enlistment."

Canada, too, had fulfilled her promises. Fifty thousand men were already at sea, shipped in every possible variety of steam vessel, and an equal number were preparing to embark when transports could be provided.

Puck, the famous New York weekly humourous journal, exactly hit off the situation, both political and social, by its cartoon, of which a small reproduction is here given.

England, by this time, had become one vast camp.

It was calculated by statisticians that the war expenditure by Great Britain alone exceeded two and a half millions sterling daily, while France and Germany were each piling up costs at the rate of a million sterling per diem.

Relatively the outlay of England was greater because she was maintaining fleets and armies at a distance from the base of supplies, but in every other sense it was impossible to estimate the tremendous losses the allies were suffering as the direct outcome of the campaign.

Cut off from their colonies, most of their warships sunk or captured, all their commercial marine swept off the seas, compelled to pay high prices for such American products as reached them—these now to cease entirely—the two great Continental nations had already received incalculable injuries, and were soon to undergo the loss of all save the commonest articles of food.

Trade, of course, was much disorganised in England, and almost at a standstill abroad.

But in this country the commercial stagnation was not so severely felt owing to the fact that the coal and iron and shipbuilding industries had never been so busy. In fact, owing to repeated representations from local authorities, Lord Wolseley directed Sir Redvers Buller to cease recruiting men from the great metallurgical and colliery districts, as the demand for labour was such that the urgent requirements of the Admiralty and private shipowners could not be met if skilled artisans and miners were taken away to swell the ranks of the army.

Some difficulty was experienced at first in dealing with the great number of prisoners of war, particularly Frenchmen taken at the capture of Havre and the battle of Yvetot, but this question was happily solved by sending them off in batches into the agricultural districts, where they earned food and money by useful work.

One of these birds being liberated at dawn.

Indeed they settled down in their new quarters with suspicious ease for the most part.

It was in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham and other large towns not specially associated with the iron and coal trades that the total loss of the Continental market and the shrinkage of the export trades all round, caused a stoppage of employment which, under other circumstances, would have resulted in much misery and deprivation.

But, as the direct outcome of the war, in which every Briton knew that he was fighting for his life, there sprang into existence a magnificent spirit of self-denial. Commencing individually, it gradually spread until it embraced all sections of society.

Every man was not content to have a sufficiency of food and raiment for himself and his family, but he deemed it a duty to see that his poorer neighbours were equally well provided for.

In London, for instance, the inhabitants of the West-End no longer held rigidly aloof from the people of Southwark or Poplar. It was necessary for the preservation of any that all should live, and when remunerative employment largely ceased, for the reasons already detailed, the Government started much needed public improvements, the rich spent as much money as they could afford in providing useful but otherwise unnecessary work, and public and private organisations took care that if man, woman, or child died through want of food or exposure it was absolutely the fault of individual ignorance or neglect.

During these brief weeks there was more practical Socialism to be seen in the internal economy of London and other important centres of population than had been dreamt or spoken of by philosophical reformers in as many centuries.

The general peril had caused the inhabitants of Clubland to realise that the coster was not a bad sort of fellow when you knew him, and the coster had been heard to declare that he never before believed "them bloomin' toffs had so much real good nater in 'em."

Marino . . . . accosted him.

Strange companionships these, it will be said, but a forest fire has produced stranger, and what belt of woodland ever blazed with such a flame as now lit up the Continent from Gibraltar to St. Petersburg?

It was a time of trial, of development, and of great achievement for England. The national character came through the ordeal purified and ennobled.

Public curiosity had been aroused by several paragraphs that had appeared in the press concerning Mr. Thompson, the electrical engineer, who was somewhat inconsequently dubbed "the Prince of Wales' inventor." But Mr. Thompson was adamant in his refusal to give information as to the nature or scope of his invention. All he would say was that it would be found valuable when the right time came.

The Prince, the Commander-in-Chief, and many distinguished officers had expressed their full confidence in its efficiency, and the troopers would require little previous instruction before using it with deadly effect.

Thus far were the reporters able to travel in their quest for this interesting news item, but the secret might have leaked out had not Lord Wolseley sent round a polite note to the newsagencies asking that no further comment might be made upon Mr. Thompson's work, as it might prove injurious to the national cause.

This was sufficient.

But it did not suffice for a certain quiet-looking person, who said he was an Italian, but was really a native of the South of France, who rented a top floor in Soho, and whose daily avocation was that of a waiter in a restaurant.

The man was far from servile or common-place in his appearance, but he discharged his duties efficiently enough and was never wearied in discussing the details of the war with customers.

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He was so eager to ascertain the progress of events that he took home with him each night all the newspapers he could lay hands on, and the authorities would have been interested in his movements had they known that he wrote a *précis* of all he could learn in the smallest of handwritings upon the thinnest of papers, which was then folded very neatly, inserted in a quill and attached to a carrier pigeon, one of these bird being liberated at dawn every fourth day through a skylight in the man's lodgings.

As these pigeons flew to Boulogne, and as the messages they carried were forwarded to Paris without delay, it may be assumed that Pietro Marino was not his real name and that his ordinary profession had little to do with attending the beck and call of diners in a restaurant.

Marino, as he may be called, was very anxious to find out something tangible concerning Mr. Thompson's secret.

All the employés at work on the invention were fully aware of the importance of concealing their knowledge of its properties, but the spy determined that from one of them and by no other means should he get at the facts.

So he fell ill at the restaurant and had to obtain sick leave, which he devoted to stalking various individuals among the men as they left the factory placed at Mr. Thompson's disposal by the Government.

At last Marino chanced to follow three of the men into a public house, and over a glass of beer he heard the youngest of them complain of the dearness of good wines and delicacies which his sick wife required, but which he could not possibly afford to buy.

Him Marino followed and accosted as the mechanic was crossing Waterloo Bridge.

"You are employed at Mr. Thompson's electrical works?" he said, speaking in perfect English and coming straight to the point.

"Well, is that any business of yours?" said the Englishman, whose temper was not improved by the reflection that chickens and old port were impossible luxuries for a working man to buy during war-time.

"Yes, it is," replied Marino. "I believe Mr. Thompson has stolen my device, and I will give £50 to the man who enables me to prove it."

The man to whom he spoke was no fool. George Slater—that was his name—came to the conclusion that his interlocutor wanted to tempt him to no good purpose, and, notwithstanding his fluency, Slater believed him to be a foreigner.

"Fifty pounds is a lot of money to a poor man," he said.

The spy felt that his object was as good as gained.

"I will give you that sum now," he almost whispered, "if you will give me full particulars of the—of the article Mr. Thompson pretends to have invented."

Slater scratched his head as though in doubt, but he really required time for thought. At last he said cautiously:

"Let us go to a quiet hotel to get some paper and pens. I will then hand you all the information in full detail in return for the sum you name."

When employed in Lord Armstrong's works at Newcastle, the Englishman had once seen a new breech-action tested, of which the object was to enable dynamite cartridges to be used in small-bore weapons.

The result of the test was that several people, including the patentee, were severely injured by the bursting of the gun, and the guileless and easily-bribed Slater now proceeded to make drawings of this fine piece of mechanism with great care and accuracy, together with much written description.

"There," he said, when he had finished, "that's the complete idea. We're making thousands of 'em, and they'll give the French fits when we can arm our men with them."

The spy siezed the papers and eagerly examined them. "It is as I thought," he muttered in a fury, "this rascal has taken from me the labour of years. But I will be revenged on him yet. There is your money," he continued. "You have done a good evening's work."

"Yes, so have you," replied Slater laconically as he counted the notes, and found that there was, indeed, the amount named by his companion. "Now I must be off home to the missus."

The pair left the hotel coffee-room in which they had transacted their business, and separated at the door.

Marino hurried off to Soho, but he did not escape the earnest attention of Slater, who dogged his footsteps all the way, noted his residence, and then started to see a friend at Scotland Yard.

"If I thought that chap would make that breech-action himself, I would not bother any more about him, as he wouldn't have long to live," he said to himself, "but I'm blest if I don't think he's a spy. He was too quick to throw his fifties about."

Slater interviewed his acquaintance at the police headquarters, and then drove home in a cab laden with port wine jellies, soups, and chickens, all articles still to be easily acquired by those who could pay for them.

When he told his sick wife of the trick he had played on the foreigner she laughed so heartily that she already felt better. Marino had at least benefited one household by his enterprise.

He awoke . . . . to find himself in the clutches of two policemen.

It was late that night when he retired to rest, having copied all Slater's notes on to the thin slips of paper that alone were fitted to travel by so small an express.

When the quill was packed and sealed and securely fastened to the leg of the bird selected out of nearly thirty pigeons which he kept in an inner room, he set an alarm clock to wake him at 5.30 a.m., and then went to sleep, proudly conscious of having done a great service to the French Government.

But he woke somewhat suddenly at one a.m., to find himself in the clutches of two policemen, and for the summer months he was accommodated with quarters in Holloway.

The quill was opened and Marino's message read. A Foreign office clerk was found who wrote a hand curiously resembling that of the ex-waiter, so, with a fresh introduction, the description of the dynamite rifle was forwarded to Franco a day later, and so long as the supply of pigeons lasted the French War Office obtained some truly remarkable and veracious accounts of the sayings and doings of perfidious Albion.

(To be continued.)

THE PICTURE POST-CARD CRAZE.

THERE are, among the readers of Short Stories, a large number who are either collectors of the picture post-cards, that at the present moment are the craze in Germany, or they wish to become so. The Editor of Pearson's Weekly is in a position to help them. A gentleman is going out to the East, in the wake of the German Emperor, and will post to subscribers one prettily-illustrated post-card from each of the following towns, Venice, Athens, Constantinople, Cairo, and Jerusalem.

Each card bears a picture of the town from which it is posted. The subscription is three shillings for the set of five cards, and postal orders should be forwarded to the "Picture Post-card Editor," Pearson's Weekly Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and the cards will in due course arrive at subscribers' residences.

It is necessary that subscriptions should be sent in at once, as the gentleman will not remain long in any one of the places mentioned above.

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LADY CONSTANCE CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with the Tablets."

PRINCESS LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent Tablets directly."

COUNTESS G. FURSTENBERG, Stammheim, Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

MR. BUTLER, Surgeon, Hampton Manor, Evesham, says: "My patient lost more than a stone.

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As follows:

1st Prize £50 To Competitor solving four or more of the Puzzle words below correctly, or if more than one, then equally among them.

2nd Prize £25 To Competitor solving three of the Puzzle words below correctly, or if more than one, then equally among them

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4th Prize £10 To Competitor solving only one of the Puzzle words below correctly, or if more than one, then equally among them.

Having purchased the entire stock of a large Christmas Card Firm, at considerably less than half the original cost of production, as well as several other important lots at ridiculously low prices for cash, we have decided this year, **for the first time**, to deal direct with the Public instead of through the shopkeepers, and are making up monster packets (sold in the ordinary way for at least 3/6), containing one dozen choice assorted Christmas Cards, for 2/- per packet, Post Free to any address in the United Kingdom (Foreign Postage, 1/- extra). With each of these packets, by way of advertisement, we shall present gratis to every purchaser a most interesting, instructive, and amusing Christmas present. This article is sold retail at 1/3, and is in great demand for winter evenings.

In addition to this, the above £100 Free Cash Prizes will be given away amongst the competitors who can make out the correct names of one or more of the six stone fruits, which the following mixed letters will spell, viz.,

RRHYEC, EEEGGGANR, CHEAP, LUMP, TAPIOCR TARNICENE.

The only conditions Competitors have to comply with to qualify them to receive one of the above Christmas presents, and to compete for the Free Cash Prizes, are as follows: Send in your solutions, and enclose Postal Order for 2/- for our Monster Packet of Christmas Cards, together with stamped addressed envelope for sending your Prize Money at the close of the Competition. The packet of Cards, and the Christmas Present, will be sent upon receipt of your order, but the Prize Money will not be forwarded until a few days after the close of the Competition, which will positively be on Thursday, December 22nd, 1898. Competitors are advised to send in their orders without delay. Address: FINE ART COMPANY, 92A Isledon Road, Holloway, London.

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NOTES OF INTEREST.

Result of Football Players' Competition will appear next week.

D. W.—One of the quickest possible ways of dispelling a nervous headache is to give some of the muscles—those of the legs for preference—something to do. Take a stiff walk, or a short bicycle ride if you can. Muscular exercise flushes the parts engaged, and so depletes the brain.

W. D.—The two biggest fire-engines in the world are in Liverpool. They are capable of throwing 1,800 gallons of water a minute, and a jet 140 feet high. You can realise the force with which the water is ejected when I tell you that the jet will kill a man at a distance of fifty feet.

M. A. T.—The "ingenious art of painting words and speaking to the eyes"—as the art of writing was called—was, according to an Egyptian legend, revealed to the god Thot and by him taught to King Thamos. The latter did not see the advantage of it; the young people had been taught orally and had to learn things by heart, and to render their studies easier by writing the wise things on papyrus or stone, so that they could "turn them up" when they liked, would have a bad effect. They didn't have a *Royal Magazine* for 3d. in those days.

S. O.—When the Soudan is properly developed, the quantity of corn that it will be possible to grow there will seriously affect the sale of American corn in this country. The soil will readily yield two heavy crops yearly. In 1878 the Soudan was as prosperous as it ever has been, but even then there were 150,000 square miles of arable land still uncultivated.

F. L.—Among the Swedish peasants the wedding festivity usually lasts several days, and some strange customs prevail. The bride's friends load her with all kinds of ornaments, which they hang round her neck, arms and ankles or place upon her dress, shoes, etc. It reads like a description of the marriage rite of some semi-civilised tribe to peruse an account of the struggle between the married and unmarried guests, the one side trying to prevent the bridegroom from taking possession of the bride and the other side assisting him in his efforts to seize her. The Swedish peasant rarely marries anyone from another parish than his own.

Luna.—When two pieces of cane sugar are rubbed quickly together, there is a slight but perfectly distinct flash of bluish-white light, which penetrates the substance far below the surface. If discs of loaf sugar be mounted on a lathe and a hammer be projected on the rotating surface, an almost continuous luminosity is obtained.

A Player asks: "What is the origin of the oval shape of a Rugby football?"——Football was played at Rugby School long before the indiarubber inflator was ever thought of, the bladder of an ox being used for the purpose. By inflating this gradually and rolling it for a considerable time on a smooth board while in a moist state, it attained an oval shape, and, as the bladder of an animal necessitated an outer covering or case of leather, that took the oval shape, too.

Birdie asks: "Where do the English swallows go for the winter?"——Some go to Rome, some to Nice and Monaco, some to Algiers and some to Egypt.

Ethel has been in the habit of keeping gold-fish for some time. Being of a tender-hearted disposition, she was very much perturbed the other day when a friend let fall a remark about the cruelty of keeping such pets. She therefore appeals to me to know what I think about it.——It certainly does seem as though there were some foundation for your friend's remark, for, according to an authority, half of such captives die from sheer want of rest. As fish have eyes so formed that they cannot endure the light, in a glass vessel they are in an entirely wrong place, as is evident from the way in which they dash about and go round and round until they are fairly worn out.

C. G.—The honour of inventing the first thermometer is claimed for three or four people, including Gallileo (about 1595) and Drebbel, a Dutchman (1609). Drebbel's instrument was a vertical glass tube with a bulb at the top and the lower end prolonged into a vessel containing water or some coloured fluid. When the bulb became warm, the expanded air drove back the water; when it cooled, the water rose again.

A. K.—The opinion has hitherto been that the majority of deaths have occurred during the early hours of the morning; that is, of course, deaths resulting from diseases. Dr. Riseri has, however, devoted some years to the investigation of this question, and states that most deaths occur during the afternoon, from two till seven. The idea that ailing people become very weak about four o'clock in the morning and were more likely to die at that time than any other, appears to be erroneous.

P. F. G. writes: "Most people know that the Russian Government blots out offending paragraphs in foreign journals or destroys those journals. But is there any instance of a book being seized in a foreign country—say in England—by the Russians?"——Well, they couldn't go to work quite in that style here, but they seem to have done the next best thing on one occasion. Some years ago, the celebrated Prince Kropotkin published a book in London concerning Russian prisons. A large edition was printed. That edition seems to have disappeared, even the author could not get a copy when he advertised for one a few months afterwards. He is of opinion that the agents of the Muscovite Government bought it up, which is very probable.

H. M.—A wasp is not exactly the kind of creature to make a pet of, one would think, but it all depends upon circumstances. Sir John Lubbock, whose study of these and similar insects is well-known, had a pet wasp once; he caught it in the Pyrenees, and succeeded in taming it. The creature used to take its meals out of his hand, and allow itself to be stroked. It was so great a pet that Sir John went to unusual trouble to prolong its life and was sincerely grieved when it died.

J. Y.—No; the poplin industry owes its origin to the immigration of the Huguenots after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The seat of the Irish poplin industry is Dublin. A century ago it was in such a flourishing condition that it was stated in the Irish Parliament that 11,000 persons were engaged in it; but in 1891 the number was less than 400. The trade is in the hands of the descendants of the Hugnenots, and very few outsiders are admitted. It is a cheap fabric, but there is now being made a white poplin of special kind that fetches £3 5s. a yard.

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